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ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

David Brin on

*Science and
the Fantastic*

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of Aliens*



Planning 28

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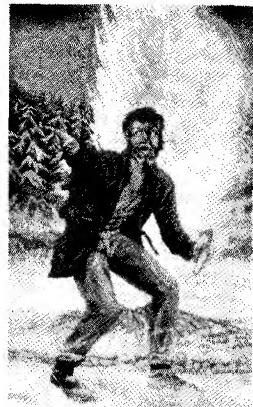
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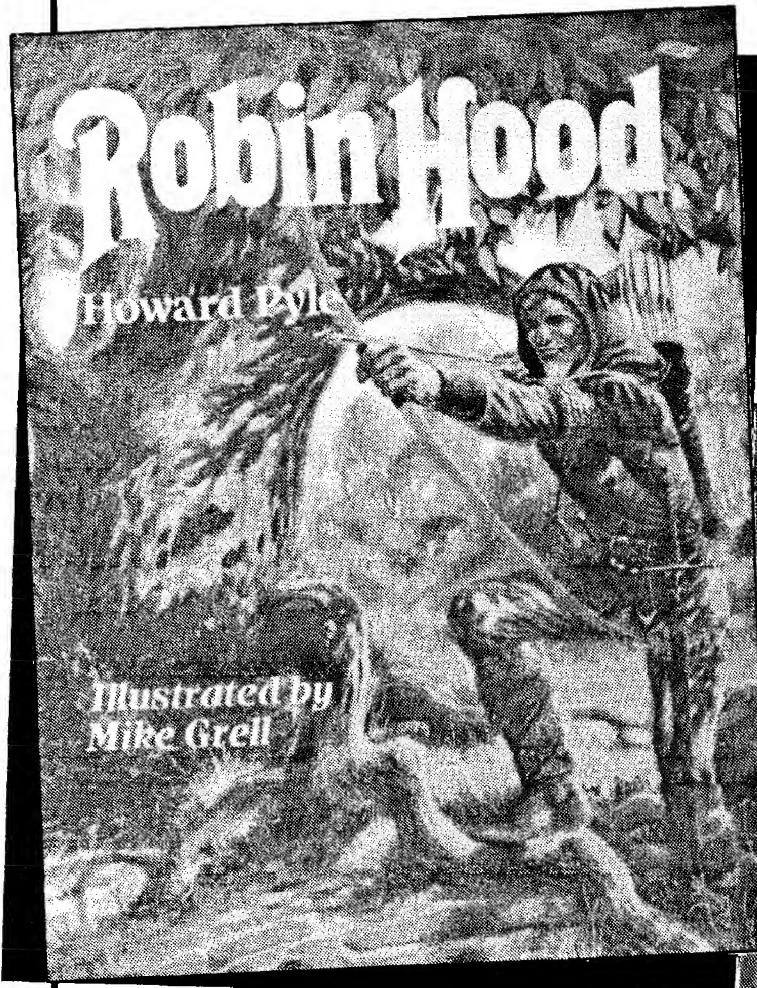
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WRITE FOR YOUR FREE STARBLAZE NEWSLETTER

In the Shadow of Bones

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by Pat Morrissey

Third Metacarpal-Right Hand
Day 1

The sun hung low, just floating above a sea that looked like chocolate syrup.

"This isn't necessary, Rick."

I moved slowly, cautiously, sliding one foot forward at a time, working my way across a greasy plank. Winter storms had transformed the Santa Monica pier into a pile of splintered wood and twisted steel girders that now tumbled into the dark water. I sat down on the sheared end of a rusted steel beam and let my soot-caked boots dangle out over the dead sea.

"You don't have to do this. You don't owe me a thing."

Hovering above my head in the warm breeze, sludge-stained gulls cried, searching for fish, but not willing to get near the water. They were survivors, smart enough not to join the other rotting corpses that were being battered about in the dark frothy surf.

I popped the straps of my backpack, and then hung the bundle from a bent rod that protruded from a shard of concrete. The pack felt far too light, but then I reminded myself that Nicky had only been twelve and, of course, small for his age.

"Just throw the whole pack in, Rick."

A distorted red sun, flecked black by passing clouds, now rested on the dark Pacific. Not a single ship was out there. Not a single white sail appeared from over the horizon — and none was likely to. Peeling back velcro straps, I reached into the backpack and pulled out Nicky's list. Like everything else in the world, it was coated with ash.

"Santa Monica pier, California," I read aloud.

"Just forget me, Rick."

It was Nicky's last list. He had updated it almost daily; adding, changing, deleting. Twelve pages long, and with more than a thousand entries, it listed all the places he'd go, all the things he'd see. Nicky had wanted to stand atop the Eiffel Tower, touch the weather-roughened front paw of the Sphinx, read the original Constitution, cross the Australian outback to

reach Ayers Rock, drift down the Ganges in a rainbow-colored barge, and even watch the Earth spin by as he floated in the Hilton lobby of the Low Earth One. And I had promised to take him. I had made that promise almost as often as he had updated his list. And Nicky, always smiling, his eyes always trusting, would just rock back and forth in his wheelchair and dream of the day we'd visit all those places. For him, it was his only reason for being, while for me, it was a game, a game I played with a sick little brother who I knew could barely survive a drive to the corner vid store. I played the game until the day he died; until the day they all died.

"We've finally started," I said, and pulling out a stub of pencil from my shirt pocket, I crossed out the entry for the Santa Monica pier. Refolding the list carefully, I stuffed it back into the pack. But before I removed my hand, I grabbed onto something hard, something that felt gritty and chalk-like. When I pulled that something out, I found myself holding a third metacarpal from the right hand. In bright red paint, Nicky's name was written across it.

"I'm not going to hold you to the promise you made, Rick. Not now."

I ran the length of bone between my thumb and index finger, able to feel the warpage, then closed my hand around it. Trapped in an almost useless body, Nicky's world had been one of picture books, vids, faraway places, and, of course, the promise I'd made.

"I'm holding myself to it," I answered.

Reaching out toward the sinking sun, into a world tinted pumpkin orange by the late afternoon light, I opened my fist, uncurling one finger at a time. The bone slipped from my open hand, and twirling end over end, like some gold-medal-caliber Olympic diver, it hit the oily water without making even the slightest splash. It would sink deep into the muck, beyond the reach of anything. A part of Nicky would always be at the Santa Monica pier. Closing the pack, and picking it up, I reslung it across my back.

"Don't do this, Rick," said Nicky, his voice slightly muffled, since it now came from somewhere deep within the pack. *"It's doing bad things to you. It's why you see the Aliens."*



PAT MORRISSEY®

I slowly stood, and shuffled my way across creaking timbers. Nicky thought I had gone insane, and that the Aliens were all in my mind. He was wrong. When you're the last man in the world your very actions define sanity. I suddenly glanced up, having sensed it, and looked back toward the shore.

"*You can't ignore it. It's a symptom, just like my twisted bones were. It's a sign that's telling you that you don't have to keep your promise to me.*"

As I watched, the Alien quickly moved away, skimming over the black sand and darting between timbers and beached ships. It was a loner, its bone bag empty. After months of their scavenging, there wasn't a bone left in the entire city. But back on that first morning, there had been a world full of bones. That morning had been so quiet, far too quiet. The night before I had just finished a thirty-hour shift of heart attacks, car accidents and gunshot wounds at the UCLA Med Center Emergency Room, and nothing short of a nuclear explosion should have been capable of waking me. But the quiet woke me. The sun was just coming up, my room still filled with gray shadows, but I staggered out of bed, knowing that I had to go to Nicky's room. He was already up, in his wheelchair, and looking out his window. With his back to me, he sat unmoving. His list lay on the floor, just out of reach of his black, skeletal hand. I knew he was dead. I had known he was dead before I had even walked into his room. The quiet had told me that. I stood next to him. With empty eyes, he stared through his bedroom window, probably seeing all those faraway places that he'd never been able to visit. But when I looked through that window, trying to see even one of those distant places, all that I saw was his ghost-like reflection superimposed over something that hovered on the other side of the glass.

The thing was crystalline, about the size and shape of a basketball, and colored blood red. It looked at me through the thousand facets of a single rust-red eye that hung suspended from a gossamer-thin stalk. A single arm, almost glass transparent, jutted out from beneath it. In its three-fingered hand it clutched a black bag. When I blinked, it vanished, and I tried to convince myself that I hadn't actually seen it.

By nightfall, Nicky was nothing more than bones and black dust. By the next morning, the sky was filled with Aliens, their bags stuffed with what I knew were the bones of the dead.

"You won't get my brother!" I screamed toward the beach.

The Alien sped over the black sand, darting around a tugboat that was almost smokestack-deep in oily seaweed, then disappeared in a flash of red light. It must have been the smell of death that had attracted them, tugging at them from light years away. I wondered if any of them had been able to detect that telltale scent two months earlier, when it had first washed up on the Southern California coast. It had been on a Sunday morning when, suddenly, every emergency room from San Diego to Santa Barbara had been inundated with people exhibiting identical symptoms: high fever, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea. Within twenty-four hours, fatalities had topped ninety-eight percent, but amazingly, after

that, no new cases were reported. Immunology took almost three days to find the culprit: *E. coli*. The bacterium resided in the gut of nearly every man, woman and child on the planet. Normally, it was an innocuous enough little bug, but this strain had been changed — one of its genes had been scrambled and sliced. Immunology described it as a clocked bacterium. Highly contagious, it harmlessly hid in the gut, doing no real damage, until something happened to it on that particular Sunday morning. A few snips of unattached DNA, sleeping within one of its genes, woke up that morning, inserted itself into just the right location, and transformed harmless *E. coli* into a killer. Twenty-four hours later, that same gene clocked again, and *E. coli* reverted back to its original, harmless form. More than ten thousand people had died. Two weeks later, an insignificant island off the southern tip of Oman was atomically erased in a joint U.S./Soviet naval exercise. It was rumored that a gene-splicing lab had been located there. I knew right then and there that some other mystery bacterium might be sleeping inside of me, ticking like a bomb. Ten thousand dead had just been a preview of things to come. Six weeks later, I woke up in a shadow-filled room, startled by the quiet.

I slipped my thumbs between the backpack straps and my shoulders and, balancing on a steel girder, walked toward the beach. Nicky's rattling bones, and the crying gulls, were the only sounds I heard.

Fourth Flange-Left Foot

Day 37

Nicky had a one-eyed jack showing.
"I'll hold," he said.

I was dealer, and with the queen of diamonds and four of clubs showing, I had to take another hit. The deck felt greasy in my hands. I peeled off the top card — eight of hearts.

"Busted."

Reaching across the felt table, I flipped Nicky's face down card over — ace of hearts.

"Blackjack," he said quietly.

Nicky had won every hand. His luck was unbelievable. I started to reach for a new deck.

"Why?" asked Nicky in a whisper.

I pretended that I hadn't heard him, and started shuffling the new deck. I'd gone through at least a hundred decks of cards since we had arrived in Las Vegas. One hand — one deck. It might have seemed a bit extravagant, but this was an extravagant place, and these were undeniably extravagant times.

"Why?" he asked again, this time with more force. The bones in the backpack rattled.

"Why what?" I knew what he wanted to know. I knew.

"Why are you scattering my bones? Why not just toss them all away, and stop torturing yourself?"

I dropped the deck of cards, letting them flutter to the casino floor. There were an infinite number of answers to that question, but only two that were really important: the lie I would tell Nicky, and the lie I'd been telling myself.

"It's like a memorial, Nicky. When I leave a piece of you at these places, you become a part of all the things you wanted to see. It's my gift to you."

Nicky said nothing.

An invisible knife made of finely tempered steel twisted in my gut.

Even though he was dead, I still played games with him. I wasn't doing this for him, but for me. Every bone I left behind, whether buried beneath the plaster-of-Paris snow that covered the Matterhorn at Disneyland, or lying in a shallow pool of brine at the Badwater Basin in Death Valley, removed some of the guilt. I hadn't been a practicing Catholic in over ten years, but the concepts of guilt and salvation had been beat into me young, when I was unquestioning and willing to believe.

A promise had been broken, and this was my penance. That was the lie I told myself, knowing it was a lie, but not willing to look any deeper for the truth. If the lie was this painful, I knew that the truth would be unbearable.

"Rick."

I turned, but not toward Nicky's backpack. I felt them behind me. Turning quickly, and pulling out the pistol that I had found in a cop car in San Bernardino, I held it in a two-fisted grasp.

There were three of them, their empty black bone bags lying across a small sand dune that had crept through the casino's shattered front window.

"No bones for you today, boys!"

I squeezed the trigger.

Bang!

Glass shattered somewhere across the Strip. They were gone, almost as if they had never been there.

I stuffed the pistol back into my waistband, enjoying the stinging pain as the hot barrel singed me, then walked over to the backpack. I reached in and pulled out a fourth flange from the left foot. Walking over to the nearest roulette wheel, I gave it a jerk, sending it spinning, and tossed the bone onto the wheel. With a handful of hundred-dollar chips, I covered the double zero. It was a long shot, a sucker bet. It was the only kind of bet worth making.

I went back to the blackjack table and reslung the pack across my back. The chattering toe bone suddenly went quiet. On my way out of the casino, without even bothering to stop, I glanced at the slowly turning roulette wheel.

"You can't lose, Nicky."

He didn't answer.

Scapula-Left Shoulder

Day 195

It was midwinter, and unless I kept blinking, my eyeballs iced over. Steam drifted into a painfully blue sky, while deep beneath the snow, the Earth rumbled. The place smelled of sulfur and wet buffalo. Icicles hung from my beard, and my ears were numb.

"Old Faithful," came Nicky's muffled voice from deep within the backpack.

Yellowstone was on the third line of the first page of his list. I would have crossed it off, but my fingers

were so stiff and wind-burned that I never could have held a pencil. Besides, my hands were full with one of Nicky's shoulder blades.

Ice crunched beneath my snowshoes as I maneuvered between Old Faithful and a half dozen buffaloes that were scavenging beneath the snow, using their big shaggy heads as snowplows. They weren't about to get out of my way. This land was theirs once again, and they knew it. An old bull, his coat shaggy and mange-ridden, pulled his gray-streaked head up from out of the snow and looked at me for only a second, as if he saw a ghost. He snorted steaming breath through his nostrils, then quickly plunged his head back into the snow.

I stepped from the snow and up onto the edge of the mist-covered ground that surrounded Old Faithful. Warmth flowed up through my boots, filling my feet with pins and needles.

Old Faithful had not erupted for at least an hour, and was due to let go any minute. A face full of scalding steam would be as fatal as a bullet in the head, but I had nothing to worry about. I couldn't die. I was the last man, condemned to wander the world alone, as punishment for breaking my promise to Nicky. I'd come to realize that it was God's will that I wander the world alone, a sort of walking memorial to what once was. But I'd fooled God. As long as Nicky was with me, I'd never be alone. I knew that God would never catch on to my little deception. He'd certainly never noticed Nicky when the world was alive, so I saw no reason why He'd start noticing him now. God was more than just a fool, He was an arrogant fool.

I moved slowly, like an old man with brittle bones, across the rainbow-colored mound that surrounded Old Faithful's geyser hole. Steaming water trickled over my boots, and the stench of rotten eggs burned the roof of my mouth.

"You'll be warm in there," I said, and threw Nicky's shoulder blade into the throat of the geyser. It bounced against steaming rock, hit the boiling water, then sank.

A gust of wind suddenly crashed against my back, and I turned, facing it, feeling it bite into my face. They hovered at the edge of the geyser basin, just before the treeline — hundreds of them. No longer carrying their black bone bags, they looked like rubies, shimmering in the bright sunlight.

"What do they want?" asked Nicky.

Tears ran from the corners of my eyes, quickly freezing before they could even roll down my cheeks. At first I had thought it was Nicky's bones they were after, but it wasn't that. Nicky was just one of the billions that had died. They wanted something special, something rare. They wanted the bones of the last man on Earth.

"Never!" I screamed into the wind, my chapped lips cracking and my clogged ears popping.

Old Faithful exploded behind me, the heat beating at my back. But the wind continued to blow, pushing the steam and boiling water away from me. It was the

(Continued to page 41)



So It Is Written

By Paul Edwards

Art by Larry Blamire

Commander Remington climbed a half-collapsed slab of ancient wall to address the natives. Before him was a featureless mire stretching to the horizon, dotted with architectural rubble from thousands of years, millions of fragmentary inscriptions in a score of alphabets. Towns and villages were apparent in the distance, but here, where the lander had touched down, the ruins were very old, the marsh more primeval, the graffiti illegible. It had seemed the likeliest place to land as they investigated the environs; of course, the mik'li had prepared it for their arrival, for so it had been written. A sea of ovals peered at him: flat oval faces not much differently colored than the soil, each with two large oval eyes like gigantic pupils a hand-span across, glossy unfathomable depths of darkness, alertness, perceptiveness. There was no hostility, just passionate fascination from the people of the planet Kaa, bewilderment from the crew of the Intercultural Contact Mission.

".... So, we estimate that the first of our technical books should be ready for you in about two months."

Lak'nahn, wearing his ceremonial water robe, translated for his people. They greeted Remington's utterance as they had all the others: an instantaneous outpouring of glee, the thousands of them hopping from one webbed foot to the other, shouting "So it is written! So it is written!" in their sibilant language.

Remington leaned toward Clay, the linguistic expert, who whispered, "So it is written." He shrugged. "You tell me. It certainly seems like they've heard it all before."

Remington looked over at Lak'nahn, who stood placidly, waiting for whatever the Sky People would do next. He looked older than the rest, his neck fringe scraggly, his neck flaps wrinkled. "May I recite some verse?" the Earth man asked.

Lak'nahn translated the request.

"So it is written! So it is written!"

Lak'nahn answered for the multitude. "We would be pleased by any lyrical revelation."

Remington launched in. "Mary had a little lamb, its fleece was white as snow. And everywhere that Mary went —"

Lak'nahn gestured impatiently. He was obviously thrilled. Remington stopped; at Lak'nahn's translation, the crowd went berserk with joy. Clay looked worried and caught his arm.

"Lak'nahn translated it all. In the last line, he used 'mok'ko,' the name of that ungulate they raise for horn and food, and their verb for travel. 'The lamb was sure to go.' "

As always, the mik'li congregation, having had enough, departed happily. Remington's eyes followed Lak'nahn; finally the impulse to speak with him overcame the Alien Contact Protocol regulations.

Stumbling over graffiti-covered relics of bygone ages, he caught up with the elder mik'li who had turned those enormous, kindly eyes upon him. In the months they had been here, none of the humans had been able to figure the expressions of the flat, moist faces. Behind those staring eyes, the attitude remained the same: intense fascination, patient expectation, alertness, and eagerness to be proved right.

"Lak'nahn, Remington desires to speak with Lak'nahn apart from the other mik'li. Will Lak'nahn come with Remington?"

The mik'li's command of English seemed to improve daily. "It is written that one of us alone should hear you. I am honored that it should be me."

Pronouns, thought Remington. *I hope Clay remembers our wager.*

Although Lak'nahn's highly mobile lips could form human phonemes, the converse was only possible in a very rudimentary way. Yet he never practiced nor engaged in small talk. He waited, as always.

Remington had learned that bluntness was the best form of diplomacy with these people. "Lak'nahn, all we have heard from your people whenever I or the other humans speak is 'So it is written.' How could that be, and how could they know?"

"It is true, and we are learned folk."

"Everything we say or do has been written down before we say or do —"

Lak'nahn tilted his head to the side, a pensive gesture. "Perhaps the technical material will be new. If it is, it shall be revered for a thousand years. We will build a new hall for it."

Gomez, the science officer, interrupted. "We aren't giving you these books to revere! They're for you to use, to learn, to build!"

"Be assured, we will learn them."

Remington stilled the frustration he always felt at mik'li imperturbability. "But where are these writings? We have never seen them, nor anyone writing."

"It pleases me to have correctly estimated that you would desire to see our writing now." Lak'nahn reached into the folds of his water robe to withdraw a scroll. The long translucent sheet was covered from edge to edge with a fine script of countless minute letters. "Here is writing that is more than four thousand years old." He handed it to his mentor, Clay.

"Is this a gift?" the linguist asked.

"Mik'li would prefer if it remained on Kaa. I can provide you with other samples of our sacred writing to keep, if you wish."

Clay, studying the manuscript, interrupted Remington's effusion of gratitude. "But Lak'nahn! None of these words are anything like the ones you've been teaching me!"

"Naturally not. This is the story of the coming of the Sea People and the creation of the First Marsh."

Remington weighed the document's importance. "If it is satisfactory to you, we will keep it for study now, and return it before we go."

Lak'nahn jumped up to hop from one foot to the other. "So it is written! We are glad!"

"Would you claim it had been written if I had decided to keep it?"

"But you did not. You will not."

"Because so it is written?"

"Because you would not violate my trust in your word, which you continually assert is essential in our relations."

Have these people been playing us for fools all this time? Remington thought.

"The commander spoke a verse today, and you knew its conclusion," Gomez snapped. "The verse was written long ago for the amusement of children, hardly a text of wisdom. Yet you — and all the mik'li — said that 'so it is written.' How can that be?"

Lak'nahn held up the palms of his webbed hands in a gesture he had learned from the humans. "I cannot say why it was written. I am not myself a writer. Nevertheless, it has been prophesied that the Sky People would come to this very place, which you have done, and do the things that you have done, and say the things that you have said. The fulfillment of the prophecy makes us glad. So it is written."

"But we have no interest in participating in your religion! We're here to teach, and to invite you to join the Stellar Combine, along with many other peoples and planets. We are not gods, nor prophets, nor messiahs!"

"So it is written."

Remington took a deep breath, trying to understand the vague suspicions which had arisen to contaminate this odd friendship. He changed his tack.

"Why don't you want us to go into the city?"

For the first time, Lak'nahn seemed to measure his reply. "It would not be good if you went there."

"Is it written that we will go there?"

Lak'nahn turned to stare at Remington, the great voids of his eyes speaking subtleties only a mik'li could understand.

"It is written that you will ask many questions. It is not good to ask some of the questions that you.... I should not tell you whether your future is written there

or not. If I unduly influence your course of action, then I commit a grave sin against the written truth."

Clay put in: "Our name for that is 'heresy.' "

Lak'nahn silently graved the new word in his memory. After ritualistic pleasantries, the elder statesman, or hetman, or whatever he was, departed. They watched him pass over the marsh with the comfortable striding gait of his people.

"Well," said Gomez, "it's obvious where the answers to the puzzle will be."

Clay answered him. "We know nothing of these people, really. Thousands of them, three of us. Lak'nahn was as definite as I've ever seen him: keep out of the city. If we break their taboo, that could be it." He drew a finger across his throat.

"We aren't making any headway toward understanding them now, are we?"

"A threat?" Remington said. "I took it that we're supposed to go to the city, but that the mik'li are not to bring us. 'So it is written.' "

The linguist frowned. "It's a mistake. Anyway, how are we supposed to find our way around? There's no use sneaking. We'll have to go straight in."

Remington interrupted Gomez before he could speak. "No weapons. We could never hold them off, and violence would make it impossible for the next team to get anywhere with these people." He looked at his men. "They won't attack. Clay, you've been studying the language. You shouldn't have any trouble guiding us — just read the signs."

T

The humans wended their way over the more solid portions of the marsh, the relics of eons of mik'li constructions, their ubiquitous inscriptions faded to illegibility on the brick, yet still clear in the stone work: lists of soldiers, descriptions of property, romantic gossip, arithmetic calculations, genealogies, prayers, petitions, crude advertising, and every manner of recordable mik'li interaction. Clay gave up trying to translate them all.

The apex of the highest dome in the city was no more than twenty feet from the moist ground. The mik'li were currently indulging in an epoch of mud-brick architecture, which Gomez considered a "perverse affectation" for a planet which suffered rainstorms of varying intensities almost every day. With stolid determination, the mik'li managed to air dry their bricks, raising walls during the clear periods.

There were no fortifications or gates, only the beginning of regularity to the placement of the squat structures. The mik'li in the streets quietly regarded the humans, pulling themselves away from intense contemplation of the visitors to continue their errands.

Gomez noticed it first: "Not much noise, or voices, or anything."

Remington grunted. He was wondering if he would be able to pick Lak'nahn out of a crowd. Several older mik'li had passed them on the street without a hint of recognition.

At a central plaza, a dozen streets radiated into

the periphery of the town. Clay read the signs aloud: "Avenue of Creation. Avenue of Catastrophe. The Boulevard of Good and Evil. The Street of the Source of Food is next to the Street of the Sensations."

Remington shook his head. "Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "We might as well take the Avenue of Creation. It's as good a place to begin as any."

The buildings were all similar, square at the base, a domed roof, with doorless arched portals. The effect was of poorly proportioned Arabic, miscolored by the sun-baked mud of Kaa to a steely gray. Randomly selecting one, they walked down a narrow corridor to reach a central chamber. A sunbeam slanted through a skylight to illuminate a dense cloud of motionless motes. There were no mik'li about.

"Fairly primitive," Gomez commented, examining a portal. "The bricks are all rectangular. You would think they would have already figured out shaped bricks for the arches."

"What makes you think it isn't this way on purpose?" Remington asked.

"A whole town? One or two buildings I could understand, but hundreds of them?"

"They abandoned the use of fired brick, which lasts for thousands of years. Why? Why are there no more stone buildings here, despite a tradition of stone construction which goes back for millennia? Those were better building methods, weren't they?"

"They're all crazy," Gomez muttered.

Clay was peering at a wall inscription. "'Three Gods.' Over there is 'Two Gods,' and beyond that, 'One God.'" He continued around the echoing chamber. "'Pantheons.' 'Sky Animals' — no, better make that 'Celestial Animals.' 'Catastrophes.'" He went on, translating all but three of the inscriptions. Remington led them into the room marked "Two Gods."

The room was a library. From floor to ceiling, the walls and stacks were completely lined with pigeonholes, each with a scroll of the same translucent material they had seen before. The few empty spaces were filled with dust. More signs divided the collection: "Good," "Good and Evil," "Evil," "Hap-penstance," many others. "Good and Evil" was split into "Combative" and "Peaceful," and the "Com-bative" area further subdivided into "Catastrophe" and "Reconciliation." Under "Reconciliation," Clay was able to read the words for "sport," "war," "gen-erative," and "sibling," but all the rest were in what he had termed "scroll language."

Suddenly, the humans were not alone. A mik'li child wandered in. He frantically gestured to them, his inscrutable face emitting indecipherable signals. Clay knelt down, trying his best to comprehend him, when an adult scurried in, quivered in distress and ushered the child out, remonstrating incomprehensibly.

"What was that all about?" came Remington's quiet voice.

"Directions. He was giving us directions." Clay turned to Remington. "He said we're in the wrong building. I think he was telling us why, but I couldn't catch it."

Remington looked at his men. "Well, this is a dead end. Lead on, Clay."

Four blocks later they came to the avenue of "The Chosen" labeled "From Within" on one side, and "From Without" on the other. Passing geographically marked buildings, they came upon "The Sea of Kaa," "The Mountains of Azok," and finally, "The Sky," where a crowd of mik'li had gathered.

The instant the humans were seen, the usual urgent sibilant hub-bub ceased. Hundreds of huge, shadow-colored eyes turned toward them. The hair on Remington's neck stood up at the touch of mik'li curiosity without its comforting aura of adulation. "Tell them we've come to examine the scrolls," Remington whispered. "Tell them we mean no harm." Clay translated.

For the first time since they had arrived at Kaa, there was no cheer of "So it is written." Remington fought fear, and marched into the building, Clay and Gomez close behind.

The central chamber was dimmer than the first. Thicker, more ancient dust lay everywhere, except where feet had trod a single narrow path. Clay read the signs: "Animals," "Not-mik'li," "Mik'li." Footprints led into the second of these. "Animals," "Ma-chines," "Alone." Again the second choice. "Know-ledge of Skill," "Knowledge of Spirit," "Oracles," "Ethics," "Messages." The path turned into the first of these serpentine stacks of shelves. There amidst an untidy pile of unrolled scrolls on the floor was the first distraught mik'li the men had ever seen. Lak'nahn turned his huge, sad eyes toward them, his neck flaps quivering.

"Did I not make myself clear? Did I not suggest that you stay away from here? Now you have done it." He stood there, trembling.

Remington came to him. "Friend Lak'nahn, how have we erred? Is it taboo for foreign folk —"

Lak'nahn interrupted him. "No, no, nothing like that. You must be who you are and what you are. To come here, that is your destiny. For Lak'nahn, it will be the Pillar of Desiccation."

"But why?"

"Because it must be written. Look, look, everything perfect until now!"

Clay read the minute inscriptions which covered the edges of pigeonholes to which the miserable mik'li pointed. "Not-mik'li came from the sky in machines bearing knowledge for Kaa, giving much, taking little, sharing their language, sharing our language, denying godhood, prophecy, and oracle; leaving to return, when some will stay, some will go." Clay withdrew the scroll. It was covered with tiny characters, hundreds of thousands of words.

"I knew I had the right one!" Lak'nahn quavered. "From our first conversation I knew it. But when you suggested that we come here, I was afraid. Nowhere is it written that not-mik'li from the sky in machines will go to the library. Now I must be dried so that my skin can be used to record your visit. Ah, me!"

Remington said, "Then we will leave at once. Explain to the people that we did not understand your instructions, that we are sorry, and that it won't happen again."

"What does that matter? None of that has been written, either." Lak'nahn had nothing else to say.

The humans left, and went back to their ship, followed only by the cold stares of the mik'li.

This is impossible!" said Gomez. "How can the Combine ever get anything going here? If anyone says anything that isn't written, some hetman or priest or whatever gets 'desiccated.' How can we change this whole culture?"

"More to the point," Clay said, annoyed, "how can we rescue Lak'nahn? Maybe he was just doing his job as master of the library of 'The Chosen,' but he's been good to us." He looked at the commander. "He's a friend. Our friend."

Remington looked glum. "The rescue regulations are quite clear. We can save our own people, but we're not to meddle in local justice, no matter what we may think of it." He looked at his men, and sighed. "They've recorded every variation of every event now and forever, except that we surprised them. Somehow, we violated the harmony of the writings. That must be restored before life can go on for these people."

"What about the technical book? Why didn't that frighten Lak'nahn?"

Clay turned to Gomez. "It's not Lak'nahn's area of expertise. These people have been around for a long time; there must be a technical library somewhere. Of course it'll have authority, because 'so it is written.'"

Suddenly, Remington smiled.

The mik'li thronged about the base of the pillar to the top of which Lak'nahn, stripped of his water robe, had been strapped. His shiny skin gleamed in the sunlight, already lighter in color with an unhealthy leathery look. The crowd had been startled by the appearance of the earth folk. Clay was pale and exhausted from a grueling night's work. Remington read page after page from a thick sheaf of paper, Clay translating.

".... Then all the earth folk came to the place of Desiccation, and spoke to the mik'li. 'You need not desiccate Lak'nahn,' Remington said, 'for all that has transpired is written truly in the tongue of the visitors.' Then Lak'nahn said, 'Thank you, Remington, for my life is spared. So it is written.'"

Clay shouted out the translation, all but the last. From atop the pillar, they heard Lak'nahn's voice. He was unbound and brought down. Water was poured over him, then his robes were returned. Unassisted, staggering, he walked to the humans. Remington handed him a sheet of paper.

Remington went on. "'Lak'nahn took the Scripture of the end of the visit of the Intercultural Contact Mission to its place in the library. Then he said'"

Lak'nahn looked at the page, a clumsy attempt at the grammar of the mik'li in the mis-spellings of an awkward script: "'Go in peace, but come again, for we have much to learn from each other.'" He looked up to see Remington holding out the manuscript. "'Lak'nahn took the manuscript, bade farewell to the visitors, who returned to their machine, and departed

from Kaa.'" He looked at Remington and Clay and Gomez. "Farewell, friends," he whispered. Spreading the webs of his hands in the mik'li gesture of goodbye, he turned toward the Avenue of the Chosen. The crowd of mik'li followed him down the broad walkway and into his library.

The tedium of interstellar flight was a relief after the excursion to Kaa. Remington reclined in his office, finishing his dictation.

"... Final recommendation: every mission to Kaa must include a stenographer. So it is written." □

Imprinting

By Terry McGarry

He was the first moving thing they saw as one by one they birthed themselves; the old goose, badly burned, had limped to the nearby cannery and laid them in the machinery's warmth, and died.

In emergency mode he had held the fire extinguishers, oblivious to the fading screams, and when the barn flames had died, returned to press gummed labels to the curves of cans, silent, with no ears to hear their peeping.

Then the cans stopped coming down the belt. Thus paused, he noticed movement underneath, and bent to see the small white spheres break open and release five tumbling lives. He watched them as he waited for new orders,

but no one ever came. His batteries are weak, but these little creatures need refueling more, so he straightens up and rolls into the empty yard, followed by a ragged yellow line. For now, they seem content to peck the ground,

and he, with a labeler's soft touch, to stroke their fluffy wings and wonder when his turn will come to hatch.

BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer



Serious Fiction

I saw a letter to an editor recently from a correspondent who was depressed over the state of contemporary science fiction magazines. Where were the light, fluffy, escapist stories which took her mind off her daily travails? I will leave it to the historians of the field to discover whether she was right about there presently being a trend toward stories about terminally ill protagonists.

Two important questions were raised. One was how to reply to this lady. She was, after all, a paying customer, and one does not tell the customer to take her money and stuff it. In publishing, the reader ultimately rules the roost. Publishers must publish what readers want to pay for — not what publishers think is morally good for them.

If the majority of SF readers want light, fluffy stories which merely take one's mind off one's troubles, well, goodbye cyberpunk. Here's the new trend.

The thing is, I don't think they do. Also, if any editor were to demand such fiction as a matter of house policy — rather than merely accept it when it occurs naturally — the writers would revolt. John W. Campbell Jr. tried all sorts of doctrinaire tricks like that, not about humor, but

psionics, political stances, and so on.

The result was a severe decline in the importance and quality of *Analog* in the last 15 years or so of Campbell's life. The good old writers left him, including the very ones he had trained and made famous. The good new writers did not take their place, which is why the late Campbell *Analog* didn't publish anything by most of the major names of the '60s, say Zelazny, Delany, Le Guin, Niven, Ballard, Disch, Ellison, Wolfe (yes, Gene had a story in *If* as early as 1966), and so on. Later Campbell discoveries like Kate Wilhelm and James Tiptree got away and stayed away.

By 1967 or so there was the ludicrous situation that if a new writer began in *Analog* with Mr. Campbell, he then "graduated" to the higher quality, lower paying magazines like *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *Galaxy*, never to give *Analog*'s higher rates a second glance.

Analog since the end of the '50s had been the place where cynical hacks made a game of rewriting John Campbell's editorials into stories and selling them back to him, playing him for a fool in the process. The record was allegedly held by Randall Garrett, who got the story into print within six months of the editorial. He must have written it within days or hours of that editorial's appearance.

And of course the non-Campbell writers triumphed. The

classics of the era are things like *Nova* (which Campbell rejected), *This Immortal*, and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, not the collected works of Christopher Anvil or even Mack Reynolds. The only really important item to appear in the late Campbell *Analog* was *Dune*, and the sequels, notably, did not. No *Analog* short story or novelette won a Hugo between Poul Anderson's "The Longest Voyage" in 1961 and when the magazine came back to life under Ben Bova. The anthologization rate for *Analog* material was the lowest for any major prozine.

Harlan Ellison put it best when he pointed out that Campbell had become the epitome of everything Campbell had led the revolution against in the 1930s. He had become T. O'Conor Sloane.

There are lots of morals and warnings in that. The chief is that the tail no longer wags the dog. No editor is in the commanding position Campbell was in 1940, whereby he can decree what the major writers in the field shall write. If he tries, they merely go elsewhere.

(Fortunately, in 1940, Campbell decreed that SF writers should pull themselves up out of the pulp mire and start writing intelligently, for adults. It's no exaggeration to say that we wouldn't even have a science fiction field today if he hadn't done this. But his failure late in life was an inability to realize that his commanding position had passed away.)

The editor's job is more passive these days. Nobody told

Rating System

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆
☆ ☆ ☆
☆ ☆ ☆
☆ ☆
☆

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

William Gibson to write *Neuromancer*. No, the crucial event occurred inside Gibson's head, and everything else followed. I am sure editors encouraged Gibson to do more, to develop what he had started, but I'm sure that if he'd been able to submit the novel to John Campbell it would have been rejected.

Which brings us back to the lady's letter. The whole magazine field should represent a spectrum, from cheerful to not-so-cheerful, with *Weird Tales* decidedly (but not to the point of being predictably) at the not-so-cheerful end, and lighter, even zany stories scattered throughout everything from *Aboriginal* to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in varying degrees. Even individual issues must be balanced, so there aren't six stories about terminally ill characters all at once. (Curiously, George Scithers and associates accidentally put together a "special Death issue" of *Amazing* once — January 1985 — but it was sufficiently balanced in tone and theme that nobody noticed, much less complained.)

But the core issue, the reason that editors can't rule by decree anymore, is that too many of the best writers in the field these days are writing *serious fiction*. If you muck with a serious writer, he will just walk away.

This takes a lot of explaining, but, like Polonius, I shall therefore be brief.

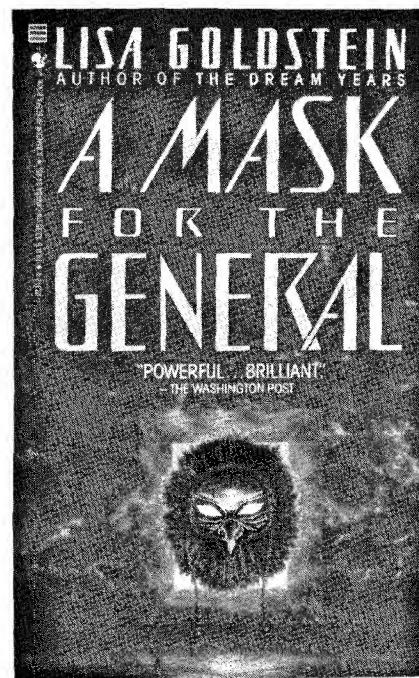
Dismiss first the mundane question SF folks get asked: "Oh, when are you going to write something *serious*?" The questioner probably knows little about literature and is confusing *realistic* with *serious*.

Dismiss also the idea that "serious" writing is of necessity gloomy, despairing, etc. When you're a couple years either side of twenty, there is a tremendous temptation toward what we used to call at Clarion "I-crawled-on-my-bloody-stumps-and-kicked-him-in-the-balls realism." But this passes. I promise.

Lots of comedy is quite serious. Some comedy is even much more pessimistic than tragedy. Mervyn Wall, in the

Fursey books, is giving a view of the human condition so bleak that he must laugh to avoid tears. It wouldn't have worked as tragedy. It would have lacked dramatic contrast and tension.

What we mean by serious writing is simply that it is something unique, from the author's own inspiration. It is in some deep sense *true*. It represents the author saying, "Look, this is how life is." It is not a matter of rewriting John Campbell's editorials or following some house rule. Since, today, no editor or single publishing house has a monopoly over the field (the way *Astounding* did in 1940), if editorial interference seriously com-



promises the vision of the story, any writer worth his salt will go elsewhere.

Serious writing, even when it's light and fluffy, doesn't deny that we die, that pain hurts, that there are limitations to what people can do, that we must take responsibility for our actions. R.A. Lafferty is a very funny writer, but incontestably a very serious one too.

The writers want it that way. It's my conviction — backed up by what remains in print decade after decade, rather than what may be temporarily popular — that an economically significant portion of the readership wants it

that way too, and will back the writers against the editors if need be.

A Mask for the General
By Lisa Goldstein
Bantam/Spectra, 1987
201 pp., \$14.95
(In paperback since,
from Bantam)

This is a marvelously accomplished third novel which manages to make effective and complex use of current cultural trends, specifically the retreat into easy-to-understand "New Age" mysticism.

The characters in the book have considerable need for escape. The United States of the early 21st century is a festering Third World dictatorship, its collapse brought on by a legendary computer criminal who wiped out all the financial records and brought the economy to a complete halt.

To shield themselves from the increasingly grim reality around them, many people join counter-cultural "tribes" who wear elaborate totem-masks and pretend to be primitives from a far land, completely unable to understand technology.

Their religion is shamanism, centering on journeys into the spirit world led by animal guides. One of the major characters goes through considerable difficulty to discover the inner, animal nature of the reigning dictator, make the appropriate mask for him, and deliver it.

It's all beautifully done, with a fine evocation of a crumbling California, good characterizations, smooth prose, and a convincing development of the protagonist from a naive teenager, in awe of the shamaness-maskmaker, to an almost-revolutionary.

The morality is ambiguous, as it is in real life. The General, I am sure, is convinced he is doing the right thing by suppressing the retrogressive elements and outlawing masks. In a sense he is right, since neolithic navel-gazing is not the way to rebuild a shattered country. But at the same time he is an oppressor whose

methods are cruder than those of the neo-primitives and far less emotionally satisfying.

Imagine Fritz Leiber's *Gather, Darkness!* written from the viewpoint of the believers — not the inner circle of people who put together a phony religion for revolutionary purposes, but the larger group who are led, by their beliefs, to oppose the government.

The way it happens in the real world.

Rating: ★★★★☆

The Dark Door
By Kate Wilhelm
St. Martin's Press, 1988
245 pp., \$16.95

Kate Wilhelm remains one of our finest writers in many of the



Kate Wilhelm

conventional, novelistic ways. She has a fine sense of character, an excellent descriptive talent, and an awareness of place. There are always real settings in Wilhelm stories, rather than bare stages which could be "anywhere in America." Her science-fictional imagination is, too, very fine. She works from central images, and the story grows out from there.

The central image here is a black nothingness, actually a malfunctioning alien space probe, which appears in a deserted hotel and emanates madness. People become homicidal. Then one man, who was scarred by this thing before, burns the place

down, and the void appears somewhere else.

It's a taut suspense story, with a sensitive portrayal of an aging ex-detective and his intelligent, supportive wife. But there are also curious novelistic flaws, things you wouldn't expect from such an experienced writer.

Both the beginning and ending are rushed before either can be satisfying. So we have the first-rate torso of a novel. The rest is sketched in.

Worse, the point of view is close to incoherent. Wilhelm is trying various forms of omniscient viewpoint, but often at precisely the wrong times she will jump out of someone's head and into someone else's. More than once I had to stop and figure out whose head I was supposed to be in and also who the other people in the scene were and what was going on. It's the "who he?" problem. If the viewpoint is rigidly controlled, we know who and where everyone else. So a newcomer is truly a newcomer. Someone referred to as "he" has been previously defined.

But if all is confusion, particularly in a scene that is supposed to be confusing anyway (like the one where the detective's mind gets taken over by the Thing and his wife shoots him), much of the suspense is lost in the subsequent analysis.

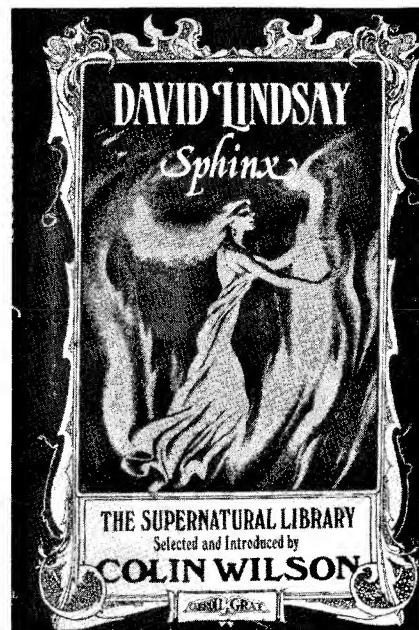
Rating: ★★☆

Sphinx
By David Lindsay
Carroll and Graf, 1988
287 pp., \$17.95

David Lindsay, the author of *A Voyage to Arcturus*, has a reputation as one of the great visionary writers of our century. But even his greatest admirers admit that he couldn't really, when you get right down to it, write. He lacked common technical ability. Yet his work has refused to die, even after the better part of a century. Content triumphed over the limitations of form. He stands as the best refutation imaginable to Samuel Delany's celebrated "style is content" thesis.

Lindsay's career was a tragedy, almost unrelieved misery worthy of a Barry Malzberg obituary. *A Voyage to Arcturus* was trashed by the critics as weird and vaguely unwholesome. It didn't sell. The critics merely ignored his later books, and those didn't sell either. Ultimately Lindsay despaired of life and, refusing to seek medical help, let rotting teeth develop into cancer of the jaw (sometimes reported as gangrene), which carried him off. Yet Lindsay was writing unique, arguably great, work, and almost certainly he knew it. This, I am sure, was small consolation in the end.

Sphinx is one of the rarest Lindsay novels, published in 1923 and not seen since, often rare to the point of utter inaccessibility.



It is not so much a good book as an interesting one, a novel about itself, and, with terrible irony, about Lindsay's own career. (*Did he know?* Colin Wilson asks in the introduction. Yes, I am certain he did.) The plot concerns intellectual prostitution, an artist compromising, then losing, her own vision.

The hero is a "chemist" working on a machine which records true, inner dreams (visions), rather than the trivial stuff we manage to remember upon waking. In the course of this he discovers the tormented soul of the artist (a singer and musical composer) who has sold out to

commercialism.

The novel takes the longest time getting down to business, because Lindsay, in a desperate attempt to make himself commercially acceptable, included huge amounts of "love interest" and social material. He could go a hundred pages without mentioning the dream-recorder or what the novel is ostensibly about. It is as if, today, Thomas Ligotti were trying to reach Danielle Steele's audience.

This was Lindsay's strategic error. He was trying to appeal to the common, mainstream audience. If he had concentrated on his imaginative gifts and tried to make himself a kind of successor to his contemporaries, H.G. Wells and Lord Dunsany, he might have gotten somewhere. (And his attempts ended in bitterness. His unsold novel *The Violet Apple* was, for two-thirds of its length, a parody of a vulgar shopgirl romance before it turned into fantasy.)

But of course the book is about itself. Lindsay's own vision slowly sinks into the mass of middle-class romantic doings. The artist and the chemist both die tragically (sort of).

You'll be surprised to find that Lindsay isn't nearly as bad a writer as he is reputed to be. Sure, he is thoroughly inept when trying to characterize through physical description. (He definitely believed in a "cruel mouth" and all that.) But he wrote spritely dialogue and *Sphinx* can almost be read as a romantic comedy with a fantastic subplot.

He could have used some strong editorial coaching. Yet there is one terribly ironic passage which can be read to indicate that Lindsay knew his own shortcomings:

"I wanted to retain any originality I might possess," explained Nicholas curtly.

"And you believed that a professional training would destroy this original cast of mind?"

"I was sure of it. By the time you have learnt all the rules, the brain is too full for anything else."

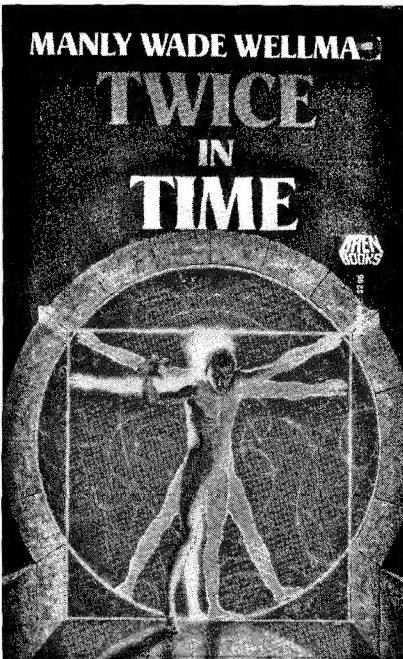
"... I fancy that opinion is responsible for sending more youngsters to the devil than almost any other." (p. 23)

It certainly sent Lindsay.
Rating: ★★☆

Noted:

Twice in Time
By Manly Wade Wellman
Baen Books, 1988
214 pp., \$2.95

Manly Wade Wellman was one of the first to walk away from John Campbell, back when that wasn't an expedient thing to do. I don't know who was in-



discreet (certainly I've never heard of Campbell being other than gracious, as iron-opinionated as he was), but after a disagreement over this novel, back in 1940, Wellman never wrote for *Astounding* again, and 1940-1950 was Campbell's decade, when he was developing Heinlein, Asimov, van Vogt, de Camp — the writers who were to dominate the field for decades to come. While classics like "Universe" and the Foundation series were running in *ASF*, Wellman was writing the likes of *Sojarr of Titan* for *Startling Stories*. By the end of the '40s he was out of science fiction, despite his undeniable ability.

Yet, in this particular argument, Wellman was right. *Twice in Time* is about a time traveler who goes back to 15th-century Florence and becomes — as if you couldn't guess — Leonardo da Vinci. Campbell saw Leonardo as an engineer, and couldn't comprehend the side of his personality which led to the *Mona Lisa*. He wanted the book rewritten, to fit his vision of Leonardo. Wellman told him to seek sharply warmer climes.

So *Twice in Time* appeared in *Startling*. It was certainly the novel of 1940 outside of Campbell's magazines. It still reads extremely well and compares favorably to de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall*, despite certain contrivances. "Leo" has selective amnesia from time traveling, so he can't remember how certain 20th-century gadgets work. He meets Lisa very quickly, then Lorenzo the Magnificent. He happens to be a superb swordsman. He happens to be artistically talented. He speaks 15th-century Italian so well that he can overawe the locals with 20th-century (or sometimes Shakespearean) English cliches.

Also included is a 1947 novelette about Nostradamus which is even more contrived. It doesn't hold up nearly as well, despite Wellman's thorough knowledge of the period and polished prose.

Rating: ★★☆

The Gate to Women's Country
By Sheri S. Tepper
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
278 pp., \$17.95

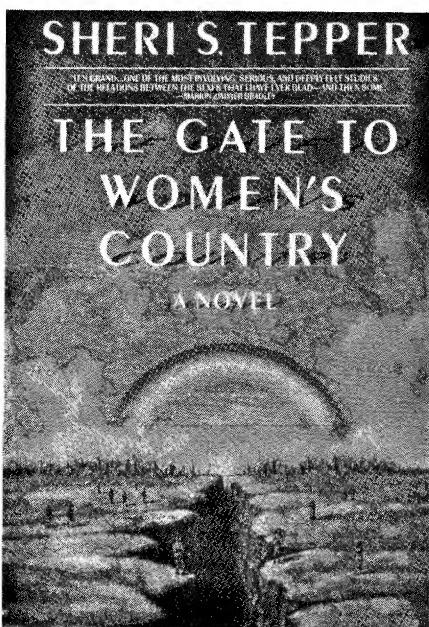
Maybe Janice will want to review this one in detail. She may be more sympathetic. I confess this book defeated me. I didn't finish it and came away with a very low opinion of Tepper's work, which I had not previously read.

This is, unquestionably, a serious, ambitious novel, about the roles of the sexes and other heavy-duty feminist/humanist issues. It's clearly attempting to reach the level of Le Guin's best.

But imagine *The Left Hand of*

Darkness written by, say, Robert Moore Williams. It would be a commendable, even heroic, effort, but I don't think too many people would enjoy it. Ambition requires technical ability, and I find, much to my surprise, that Sheri Tepper is (compared with the above books) nowhere near the stylist Manly Wade Wellman was in 1940, much less what Lisa Goldstein is today.

Even David Lindsay would know better than to write, "A few crepuscular rays broke through the western cloud cover in long, mysterious beams, as though they were searchlights from a celestial realm, seeking a lost angel, perhaps, or some escaped soul from Hades trying desper-



ately to find the road to heaven. Or perhaps they were casting about to find a fishing boat, out there on the darkling sea...."

Argh. My advice for the future is that someone, either Ms. Tepper or her editor, slog through the dense elephant grass of her prose armed with a blue pencil and, whenever wandering herds of adjectives appear — shoot to kill.

Rating: $\star \star$

*Robert A. Heinlein,
The Man Who Sold America
(Heinlein in Dementia)*
Edited by D.S. Black
Atlantis Express
28 pp., \$2.00

The corpse is hardly cold before the revisionists get to work....

The authors, three Canadians and an American, explore what Heinlein means to them, what he meant to SF and the American culture. The conclusions aren't quite as negative as the titles would imply, but they do dwell as much on the embarrassments of Heinlein as on his strengths. (Since those embarrassments are quite real, this has to be part of a balanced discourse.)

Phil Payne is the most arresting, with deliberate attempts to outrage American political

sensibilities (e.g., his statement that the only Americans with guts during the Vietnam era were those who fled to Canada).

But he makes a good case for the common perception of Heinlein being wrong, arguing that Heinlein espoused collectivist rather than individual values, and that his ethic was not that of the frontier, but of a small midwestern city — and that, further, most Heinlein supporters haven't the slightest idea what individualism or a frontier ethic means.

Rating: $\star \star \star \star$

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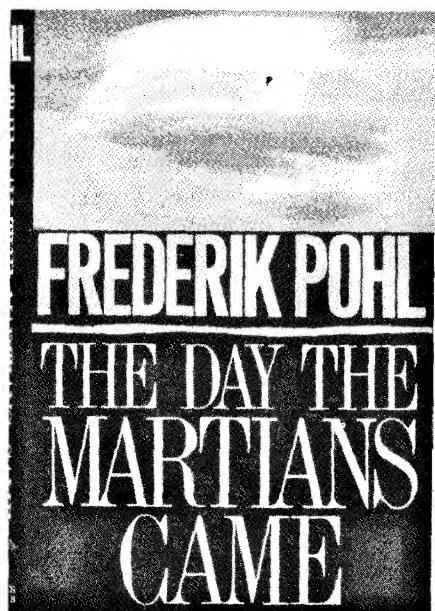


FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

Stretching the Boundaries

The Day the Martians Came
By Frederik Pohl
St. Martin's, 1988
248 pp., \$15.95



Frederik Pohl's new book is not a novel, despite what the inside flap says, but an excellent linked short-story collection. Most of the stories have been published before, including one which appeared in *Dangerous Visions*, though in somewhat different form. All are interesting, including those written especially for this book. They read more like mainstream fiction than SF; in

Rating System



Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

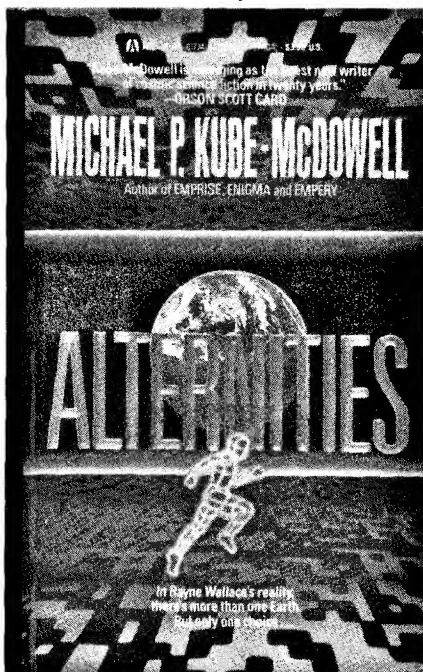
fact, the science-fictional aspects of the stories are the least convincing.

The Seerseller expedition to colonize Mars is a tragic failure, due to serious equipment problems: nearly the entire crew dies, and the proposed colony is dead as well. On Christmas Eve, shortly before the survivors are to return home, Henry Steegman discovers real, live Martians, degenerate descendants of a more advanced race which left artifacts under the surface. The rest of the book follows the effect of this discovery on a number of people, including a screenwriter with visions of Barsoom, an aerospace consultant, an exiled Soviet space scientist, two UFO-promoting con men, a heroin addict, a public relations man, and a religious cultist.

The book is about humans, not Martians, and Pohl's characters are three-dimensional, convincing, and alive. The stories are generally satisfying, even if the cultist one resolves too neatly. I particularly liked "Too Much Loosestrife" (about the addict), "Iriadeska's Martians" (the PR man and a comic-opera military coup), and "The View from Mars Hill" (the exiled scientist). Pohl has included some pointed political satire too. The "science" articles presented to justify the existence of the Martians bored me and I skimmed over them, but people more interested in the rivets would like them, and they're kept short.

I wouldn't have thought there was anything new to be written about men from Mars, but Pohl

has proved me wrong, and done a bang-up job of it. If you want proof that science fiction can produce characters you'll care about, read *The Day the Martians*



Came, and learn more about the human race.

Rating: ★★☆☆½

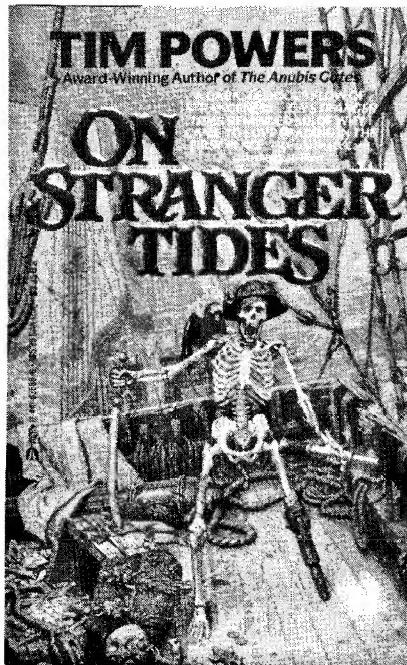
Alternities
By Michael P. Kube-McDowell
Ace, 1988
383 pp., \$3.95

Michael Kube-McDowell's new book is probably the definitive parallel universe novel. The author successfully combines careful speculation with the human dimension to create a compelling, suspenseful novel.

When the gateways between alternate timelines (called alternities) are accidentally discovered, the U.S. government

immediately puts them to use. Most of what is brought back from other alternities is technology, but certain characters have other uses in mind: a senator wants sex slaves, and the President plans to use the alternities as an escape hatch. Protagonist Rayne Wallace, a low-level operative who travels among the alternities, just wants to keep his job, his marriage, and his life. The different strands are woven together well.

There are some flaws in characterization, although they are not enough to strain the reader's credibility. KubemcDowell's villains are a bit too evil, and Wallace is too obtuse about his wife's needs and



desires, though otherwise likable. The speculation on what would happen if alternative Earths were truly discovered is unfortunately credible, as are the different alternities (ours, by the way, is not visited in the course of the novel — an intelligent decision on the author's part). The themes include support of internationalism and an attack on government secrecy, but the reader is not hit over the head with them.

Alternities is an exciting, well-thought-out adventure novel which also provides food for thought. It is enjoyable and engrossing.

Rating: ★★★★

On Stranger Tides
By Tim Powers
Ace, 1988
322 pp., \$3.95

Tim Powers is one of the bright lights of the so-called "steam punk" movement. *On Stranger Tides* crosses fantasy with a pirate novel, and the result is wonderful.

The story is set in 1718. John Chandagnac, a puppeteer and bookkeeper, is on his way to the Caribbean to confront a relative who did him wrong. His voyage is interrupted when pirates seize the ship, and he soon joins them, as Jack Shandy. He begins to learn their *vodun* magic, and eventually finds himself accompanying the terrifying Blackbeard on a journey to the Fountain of Youth. By then he has fallen in love with innocent, beautiful Elizabeth Hurwood, but her father has grimmer plans for her ...

On Stranger Tides is an excellent, very strong, and highly imaginative novel, with superb characterization and detail. It is as suspenseful and adventurous as a good pirate story should be, and you soon accept the magic as casually as the characters do. Powers cleverly interweaves fantasy with history, and I like the idea that magic dies out as things get more "civilized."

An interesting period in history, a good story, lots of villains, heroes, and in-betweens, magic, romance, adventure — what more do you want? Go get it!

Rating: ★★★★½

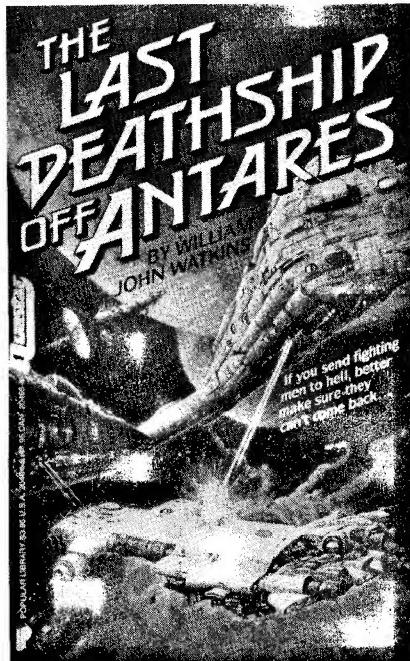
The Last Deathship Off Antares
By William John Watkins
Popular Library/Questar, 1989
204 pp., \$3.95

I've just reviewed a fantasy pirate novel; now I'm going to discuss a science-fictional prisoner-of-war drama. *The Last Deathship Off Antares*, despite the melodramatic title, is an interesting, well-constructed adventure, though the ending badly strains credibility.

Humanity has gone to war with aliens known as Anties. However, corruption and greed

have led to ships and weapons which don't work, and the human fleet is easily defeated. The Anties' code of honor doesn't allow them to kill those who have shown themselves cowardly by surrendering, so the thousands of human prisoners are placed in deathships, where they fight and kill each other for survival. William John Watkins follows a group of men who must learn to cooperate to find a way out.

An aspect of the plot that I greatly appreciated is that everything that happens follows logically from what's gone before, and anything that seems odd later is seen to be perfectly natural. Too few novels can accomplish that. The novel is



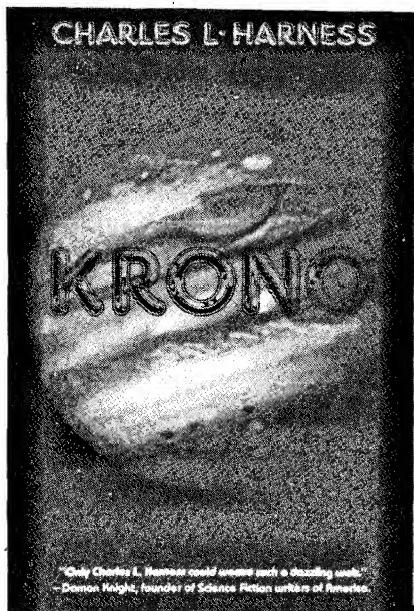
believable in its portrayal of a war of all against all, though reform is too easily accomplished. The design of the deathships is cleverly insidious, and a dangerous cult known as the Dead is a stroke of grotesque imagination.

The visual descriptions should have been more vivid: I never quite got straight what the inside of a deathship niche looked like, or the bridge of an Antie ship, or even the narrator, who remains vague and fuzzy, not even given a name. Also, the book's politics are highly simplistic. It's very unlikely that the war Profiteers would directly

run the government themselves — that's not how these things work.

Despite my criticisms, I liked the book and became quite involved. The Anties are perhaps too much based on popular conceptions of the Japanese in their adherence to a strict code of honor — would they really be inflexible enough to stick to it, no matter what the cost? And is that truly admirable? Watkins doesn't discuss the issue. But in wishing he had, I'm looking for a different book than the one he wrote. This one is nastily realistic — not suspenseful, since it's pretty clear how it will turn out, but involving.

Rating: ★★☆



Krono
By Charles L. Harness
Franklin Watts, 1988
202 pp., \$16.95

Charles L. Harness's new novel is interesting and original, but incoherent. This highly unusual treatment of time travel is often poetic, but just as often confusing.

The Earth has been all but destroyed, to the point where it cannot sustain much life. Excess population is supported by establishing colonies in the distant past, in a sort of time bubble created by the genius Ratell. James Konteau is a Krono, who

travels through time surveying settlement sites and planning the colonies. As the book opens, he is unsuccessfully trying to get over his wife's leaving him. Konteau is manipulated into discovering an evil plot, and finds himself — and his ex-wife — at risk of death unless he exposes and destroys it.

Harness has included some brilliant, original touches, like time travel making possible true divination by animal entrails. The writing is stylistically impressive. However, the book is ultimately frustrating because of its incoherence. Much of the time I wasn't sure what was going on, but several times I figured problems out long before the protagonist managed to do so. Also, there are inconsistencies that the author doesn't explain away.

The plot is complex, and it has major weaknesses. Two important events near the end smack of *deus ex machina*. Most incredibly, Konteau fails to notice the unbelievable statement by one character that he "simply forgot to mention" a major feature of a piece of equipment. Konteau's repeated thoughts that at least his son would not be in the Krono corps telegraph the ending; that and the relationship with his ex-wife go by the book. I like Konteau, but the other characters remain one-dimensional. The villain is far too villainous — a murderous, ambitious religious fanatic with no redeeming characteristics.

Harness does so many things right, and so many things wrong, that it's hard to know what to think about this book.

Rating: ★★☆

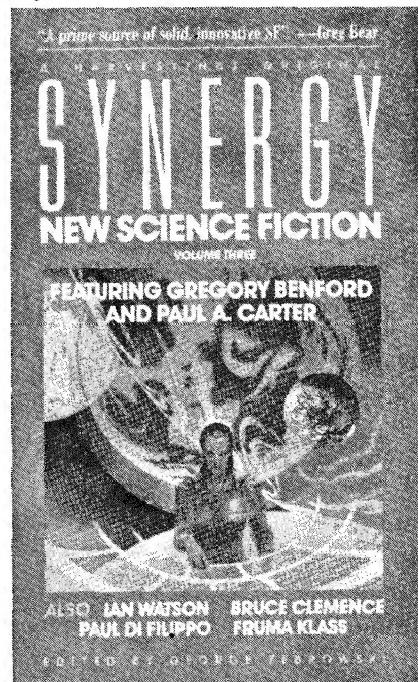
Synergy: New Science Fiction, Number 3
Edited by George Zebrowski
Harvest/HBJ, 1988
220 pp. in proof, \$8.95

The Synergy series of original anthologies has been a well-kept secret, a victim of overpricing and poor marketing. Having read the most recent volume, I hope the publisher doesn't succeed in killing it off.

Synergy's contents are inter-

esting and varied. The varied nature means that not all the stories will match your taste, but they're all worth reading. This issue (Fall 1988) is biased toward hard SF, but not of the sort that you find in most of the other paperback magazines.

Editor George Zebrowski has included two first stories which are impressive debuts. Fruma Klass's "Before the Rainbow" tackles the voyage of Noah's Ark and depicts believable emotions very well, in addition to being mostly convincing on the practical details (admirable, given what she had to work with), though there was a little too much Mother Goddess worshipping for my taste. Bruce Clemence's "All



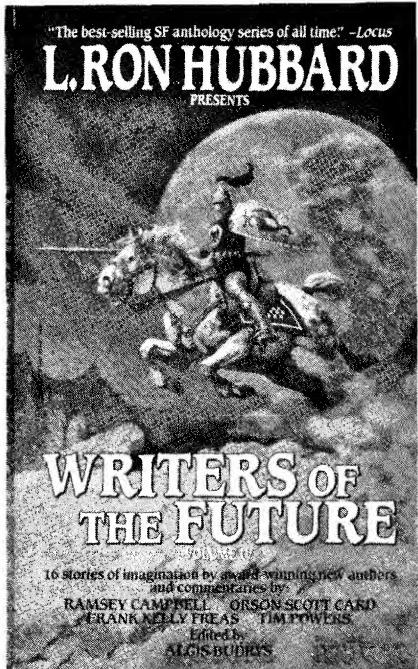
"the Livelong Night" is evocative and haunting, but somewhat obscure.

The other stories are by better-known authors. Paul Di Filippo's "Phylogenesis" is a fascinating extrapolation of humans genetically engineered to resemble viruses after the destruction of Earth. I have no ability to evaluate the credibility of the biology involved, but I enjoyed it; however, the story deals with the main characters at a remove, and I found it difficult to get emotionally involved with them.

The keystone of the volume is Gregory Benford and Paul A. Carter's novella "Proserpina's

Daughter," about life in that unlikeliest of places, Pluto. There was too much lecturing on hard science for me, but I was nonetheless interested; it should work even better for those with more concern for the nuts and bolts. The ending is scattered and confusing, and it felt rushed; it was also dramatically unsatisfying. The authors would have been better off ending the story at an earlier point.

The book also contains an essay by Ian Watson, "The Author as Torturer," expanded from a talk he gave at Sercon. It is a probing and important analysis of the uses of cruelty and brutality in the SF genre. While you may not agree with all his



points, you cannot dismiss them.

All in all, this is a good volume; I hope the publisher gets its act together and keeps the series going.

Rating: $\star \star \star \frac{1}{2}$

*L. Ron Hubbard Presents
Writers of the Future, Vol. IV*
Edited by Algis Budrys
Bridge, 1988
425 pp., \$4.95

The Writers of the Future contest is somewhat controversial, mainly because of its association with the late L. Ron Hubbard, the science fiction writer who started the Church of

Scientology. However, the encouragement, attention, and money it provides to new writers make it worthy of support. When it comes to this latest anthology of prize-winners and finalists, what you think of Hubbard doesn't really matter, though you'll have to wade through a bit of deification of him and a wrong-headed essay written by him.

The stories included are fair to good — no embarrassing failures, but nothing to write home about either. I doubt many of them could have been published in magazines, though most show promise.

The best story in the anthology is Jane Mailander's "Buffalo Dreams," an enchanting fantasy about life on America's closing frontier. I also enjoyed Jo Beverley's "The Fruit Picker," a surrealistic vignette about life after the plants have revolted against their oppression. Flonet Bilgen's "The Troublesome Kordae Alliance and How It Was Settled" is a charming fairy tale, while Mary A. Turzillo's "What Do I See In You?" contains some haunting imagery.

The non-fiction pieces are generally interesting, with Ramsey Campbell's essay on writing horror being the best. Though the art is by experienced professionals, it is not all that interesting.

Remember that these are, in most cases, the first published stories by the authors, so don't expect Hugo-caliber reading. However, the book is certainly worth taking a look at, and I suspect that we'll be hearing more from several of the authors.

Rating: $\star \star \star$

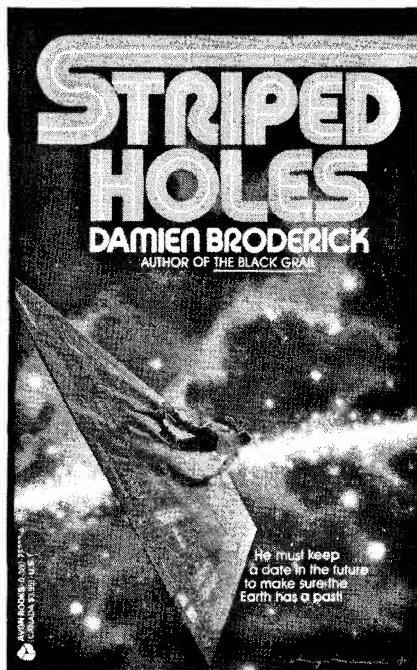
Striped Holes
By Damien Broderick
Avon, 1988
180 pp. in proof, \$2.95

There's been a lot of funny science fiction published recently, though most of it is not packaged to indicate its humor, apparently because humorous novels are hard to sell. *Striped Holes* is another such book, a very funny novel of aliens and time-

travel, though the cover gives you few clues.

The plot is difficult to describe. The action appears free-associative, yet everything ultimately turns out to be related to the story (except for a subplot about a troubled robot marriage, which is merely funny). The author's wit and invention don't falter, even if we're never quite sure exactly what striped holes are.

The book includes a number of good passages and turns of phrase. Lots of SF clichés are thrown together and stirred up. There are time machines that look like loaves of bread sliced lengthwise, lovelorn machine in-



telligences, the Callisto effect, astrology, talk shows, and much more. If you don't like silly humor where the author makes regular asides to the reader, then pass this one up. As for the rest of you: go, enjoy.

Rating: $\star \star \star \frac{1}{2}$

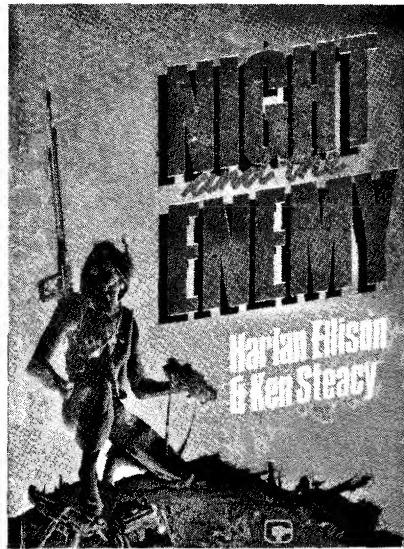
Night and the Enemy
By Harlan Ellison
and Ken Steacy
Comico, 1987
Unnumbered, \$11.95

In this graphic "novel," Ken Steacy has collected and illustrated several of Harlan Ellison's early stories about humanity's war with the Kyba, with

framing material provided by Ellison. The book is interesting, if not up to the caliber of Ellison's later work.

Though these early stories are generally straightforward science fiction — including a Campbellian problem story, "Life Hutch" — they display much of the talent that Ellison was to reveal later. They're well done, but don't come expecting the pyrotechnics of "Repent, Harlequin!" Said the Ticktockman." The art is striking, if a bit too comic-bookish for my taste.

Ellison says his interest in these stories of the Kyba War has been reignited, and I'd be very interested to see what he'd do with them now. This version is



worth reading, especially for Ellison fans.

Rating: $\star\star\star\frac{1}{2}$

Bright Shadow
By Avi
Aladdin/Macmillan, 1988
167 pp., \$3.95

Science fiction and fantasy seem to be natural subjects for children's books, since most children's sense of wonder has not yet been crippled. Juvenile novels are, however, very difficult to write well. Avi's novel *Bright Shadow* should appeal to any child who enjoys fairy tales.

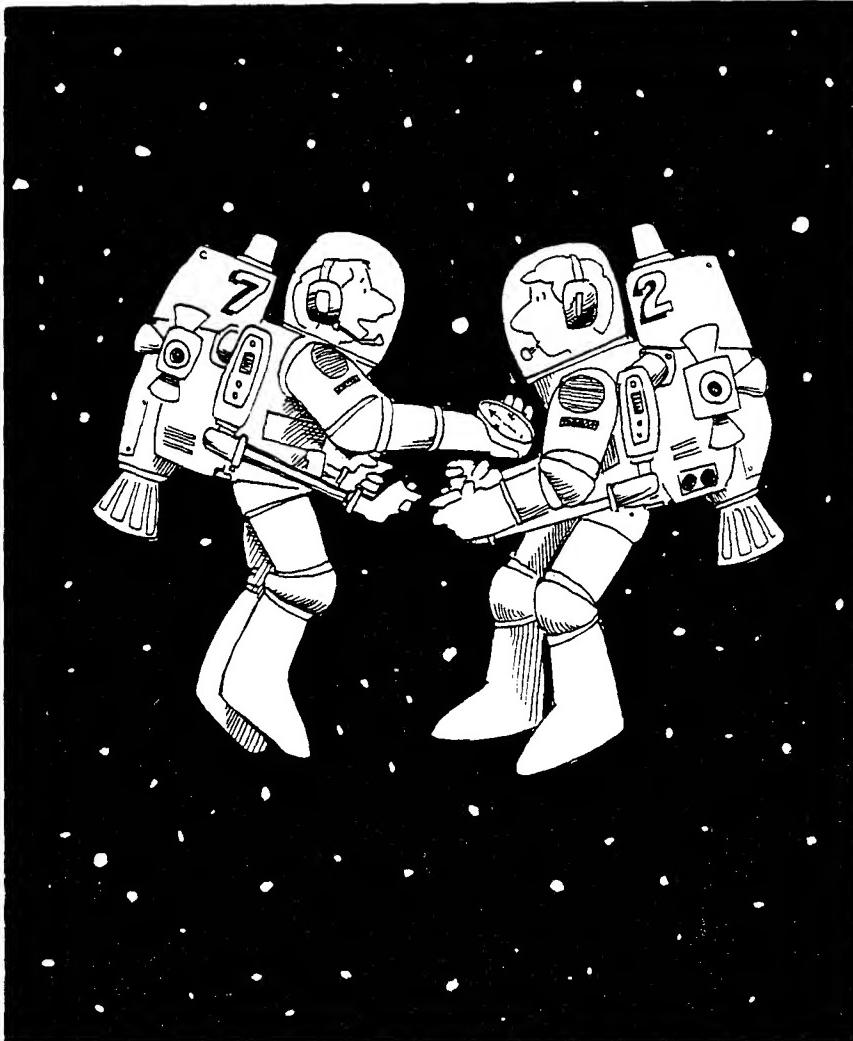
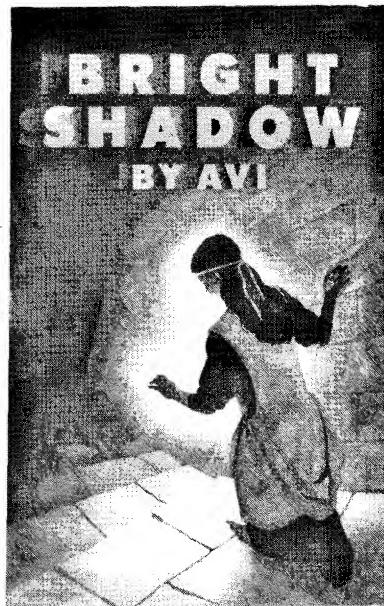
Morwenna, a lowly young servant in the King's palace, by happenstance runs across a dying wizard who gives her the last five

wishes in the kingdom, which come with a few annoying conditions. The novel follows her as she tries to use them carefully, to maintain her relationship with sweet but dull-witted Swen, and to protect Swen and herself from evil King Ruthvin. At the book's climax, she becomes unwillingly involved in a popular revolution.

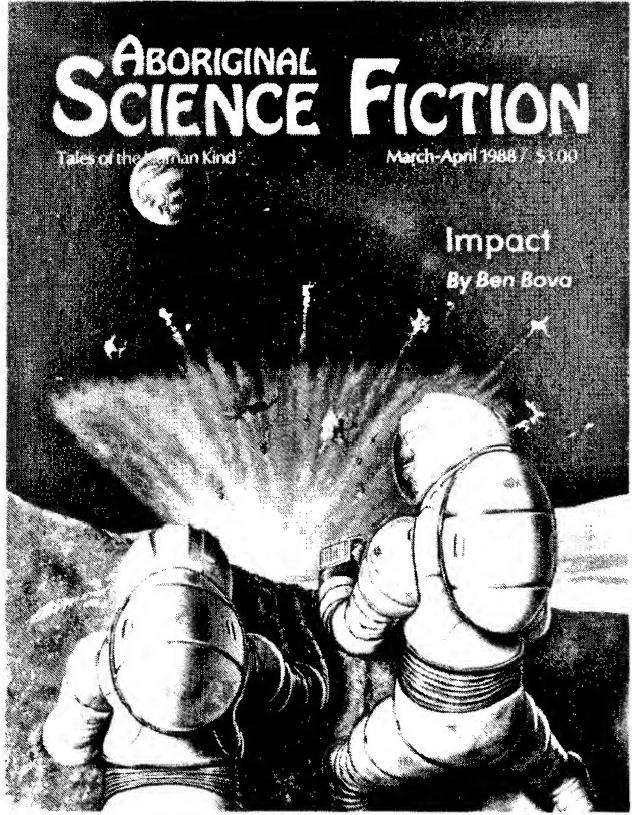
Despite being a children's book, *Bright Shadow* held my interest, which means it doesn't talk down to its intended audience. I enjoyed the story and the characters, especially Morwenna and Gareth, the leader of the revolution. It is simple, as a children's book should be, but not simplistic. It contains a strong, un-padded narrative, and is an excellent variant on the theme of

the lowly person granted wishes.

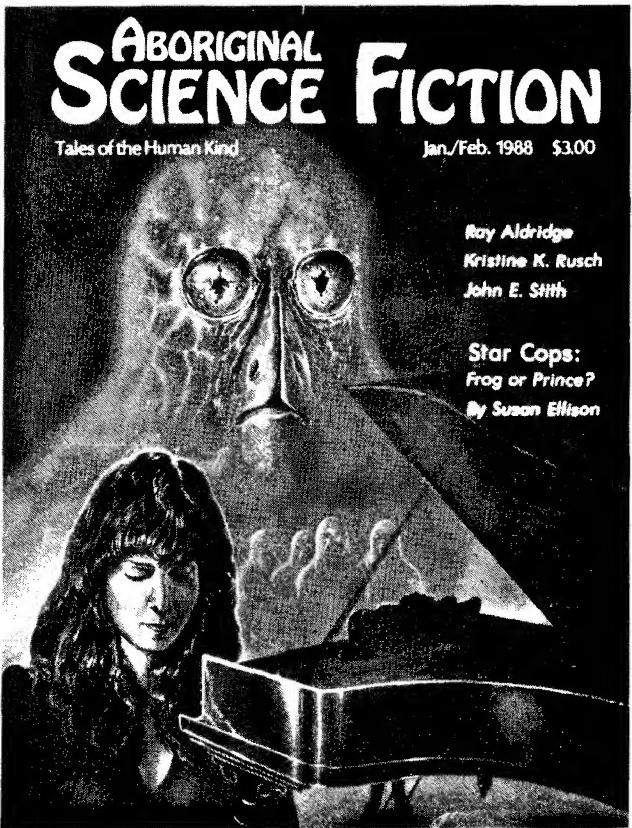
Rating: $\star\star\star\frac{1}{2}$ □



Don't worry. I brought a compass. See?



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Salvage

By Rosemary Kirstein and Sabine Kirstein Art by Larry Blamire

The handle of the knife was longer than one a human might use, and carved with patternless swirls. Moss fit his fingers around it as best he could, feeling its heft, switching from hand to hand, point out to point in. He stooped down and tested the blade on the corner of his vinyl equipment bag.

"Moss?"

He turned. Vreeland was looking at him, her face showing concern under the carefully calm surface. "Are you all right?"

He forced a shrug, and straightened. "Sure."

She nodded, then pointed with her chin to his hand. He looked down and saw he was still holding the knife. He resisted an urge to fling it out to the horizon. Instead he simply opened his hand. The knife dropped back into the dust where he had found it.

He discovered a mote of anger in himself, embraced it and turned it on her. He sneered, "I was hardly about to use it."

She nodded, turned back to her work. Her patience struck him harder than a return of anger would. He briefly felt ashamed, then the blankness, the emptiness took him. He missed the anger, but somehow it seemed not to matter, again.

Moss stood ankle-deep in gray dust that covered the rubble-strewn plain, from a whitish area that may once have been a beach, all the way to the shattered foothills to the north. The dust was all that remained of the organic material that had lain exposed on the surface of this world. What part of it had been plants, what part animals or sentient beings, could no longer be discerned. Looking down, Moss traced a half-circle with his foot, disturbing the remains of perhaps a dozen people, perhaps none.

He glanced back at Vreeland. She was squatting just past the remnants of an entrance arch, absorbed in her work. Moss felt her presence here, on this world and in his life, as a reproach. She had the vigor of a healthy body and the liveliness of a healthy mind. She moved through the sea of dead matter with the same cheerful efficiency she showed moving through the compartments of their ship. She seemed charged with energy, but not like a live wire; like a battery, ready to discharge where needed. She never hustled.

Moss thought again of the knife. He could put it in his pocket, could take it back to the ship. Even on a

ship as small as theirs, there would come a moment when she had to be elsewhere, had to leave him completely alone for the brief moment he needed. The thought was as attractive as a glass of cool water, as a warm bed, as rest.

Vreeland was occupied with photographic equipment. Keeping his eye on her back, he dropped to one knee in the dust, groped with one hand. Something solid met his fingers. He closed his hand around it —

Vreeland said suddenly, "Have you found anything?"

With a start, Moss pulled his hand back. There was something in it. "Yes," he replied, and looked.

It was a bowl, shallow and small, but heavy for its size. Dust coated it in a thin film. With one finger, he wiped a clean line from its center out to the edge.

Sudden bright color, as startling as a shout. Freeing one edge of his shirt, he wiped the object.

It had been carved of stone, but a stone fine-textured and delicate, translucent. Cobalt blue at the rim, the color faded down the curve to pale blue, blending into palest yellow at the base. It seemed to have been chipped from the sky, where the faded sun glowed faintly in a blue too dark for full day.

Its beauty halted him, halted his breathing, his movements and his thoughts. He realized Vreeland was at his side, and did not know how long they both had been standing there.

At last she broke the mood. "How did it ever survive?" She scanned the ground and knelt, sifting the dust with her fingers. "Maybe there's another." She pulled out something: the knife. She put it in her pocket without comment. "There's something down there, like a stack of rocks, or stone blocks. Enough of them must have fallen nearby so that the bowl was protected a bit when the roof came in." She stood and brushed off her hands. "This could turn out to be a good spot." She gazed out at the ragged horizon. "Look, why don't you keep working this area, and I'll scout a bit further —" She glanced at Moss. "I won't go out of comm range ... in case you should need me ... or you find something."

He didn't look at her. "Sure."

Vreeland started to speak, stopped herself, then began again. "If we can find even one more piece of this quality, we'll make back what we paid for salvage rights. After that, it's all pure profit." She eyed Moss.



W.H. Johnson 88

"We'll be home in no time."

"Right. Home." Home was not what he needed, or wanted. "Yeah, well, don't hurry on my account."

"Damn you!" He turned. She was standing apart, her hands moving helplessly. "I don't know why I bother! I don't know how to — Have it your way!" Moss watched expressionlessly as she stalked off, then closed his eyes in blessed solitude, drawing the silence around him like a blanket.

Was he the only one who felt it? he wondered. The passage of time, the emptiness beyond? All his days, he sensed the shortness of days; in every event and every act he knew the briefness of events, the uselessness of acts. There was nothing to stop their vanishing, and foreknowing that, no reason to seek events, acts, life.

Had he always felt this? He thought perhaps so, but never so clearly as in these years in this work. Each world they sought added its own particular confirmation, as he and his partner scavenged through the dead treasures of vanished cultures. Had he at last reached the point when no amount of rest on the worlds of the living, no amount of wealth to spend on the pleasures of the vigorous civilizations that they always came home to, no reassurance of life could convince him?

For vigor fades, he knew. The living die, and reassurance is a lie.

His communicator yipped. Moss opened his eyes. The dead surroundings so matched his inner world that he felt as though his eyes were still closed. As if blind, he groped at his belt for the device.

"How's it going?"

"Fine." Moss exhaled shakily. Vreeland's voice was like a beam of laser light cutting through the gray. Moss didn't want the illumination.

"Have you found anything else yet?"

"No, not yet."

There was a pause. "You are looking, aren't you?"

Moss scanned the area so it wouldn't be a lie. He saw the fallen archway, and the tumbles of stone all about him. He saw now that these clearly outlined a room, and that beyond, other rubble clearly outlined the house that had contained it. He moved over to one side, where a few blocks barely emerged from the dust. Here, he decided, there must have been a window.

"Sure," he told Vreeland. "I'm standing by the window." In the distance the mountains were rent by a huge cleft, like an axe blow. "Great view."

"Well, I've got something here," Vreeland continued. "I'm standing in what looks like a plaza. There's a sort of fallen obelisk, must have been about forty feet high. There are markings all over; writing, I'm sure. It'll have some archeological value, at least. Still, I wish we could get something as fine as that bowl. Any chance you're in a museum? Or maybe the person who lived there was a collector?"

Moss resigned himself to work. He turned back to the place where he had found the bowl, carefully placed it on the ground, and began to sift the ash around the spot desultorily with his fingers.

Vreeland's voice came through the com-

municator, barely a whisper. "Christ. Bones."

"What?"

She went on. "I've been digging around the obelisk ... there are just bones, everywhere. I've found — it's hard to say without knowing what these people looked like. If these squarish hollow things are skulls, I've hit twenty, already ..." Moss could hear the sounds of Vreeland working: the hiss of dust being shifted, thuds and clatters as she moved objects ... "Christ." There was silence a moment. "I think this place must have been packed with people when the flare hit. There're no signs of violence, none of the bones are shattered. I don't think they were rioting. They just seem to have all gathered here together. Perhaps they knew what was going to happen."

"So they all gathered together. What the hell for?" His fingers found something under the dust. He dug around and tried to pull it up.

"Maybe this obelisk is a religious symbol, or a monument. Or maybe they just wanted company ..."

The object came up suddenly in Moss's hands; a squarish hollow thing.

"... no one wants to die alone," she said.

The skull was half again as large as a man's, with double bulges front and back. On each side, about halfway along, were hollow depressions that might once have cradled eyes. Moss held it with both hands at arm's length. He tilted it; a long line of dust sifted out of one socket.

On impulse, Moss pulled up a handful of dust from directly beneath where the bowl had lain. The dust sieved out through his fingers and he was left with two dozen tiny bones all the same size, like the bones of a hand.

He dropped them and sat down, staring into middle distance. If, as Vreeland guessed, the people of this planet had known what was coming, then this being, this alien creature, this — person, had chosen to be here at that moment. Putting down the skull Moss reached over, and with the most delicate touch possible, traced the circle of the bowl's rim with his finger.

"Moss, are you still there?"

"Shut up."

"Do me a favor and say something once in a while. I want to hear your voice now and then. Are you making any progress?"

"Yeah. I found the guy who owned the bowl."

Vreeland made a frustrated sound. "That's no good to us. If he had more of them, he might have kept them on a shelf, or in a cabinet. Why don't you look for that?"

Moss sighed. Shelves and cabinets; up against walls. He rose, took a shallow shovel from his pile of equipment and went to the wall opposite the window. He began digging into the ash. Vreeland spoke again. "Why don't you ask me how I'm doing?" Moss made no response. The blade hit something solid. He found its limits and began shifting dust in earnest.

"Well, I think I've got something like a time capsule," Vreeland said. "I found it at the base of the obelisk. This might have been the point of the whole thing: a marker for the capsule. It's a metal cylinder maybe ten feet high, sixteen across. I'm looking for an opening." She waited for some reply. "Moss, come on,

cheer! This is exactly what we need."

Moss stepped back from his excavation. Before him, half uncovered, lay a metal object four feet square. "It's a safe."

"What?"

"I've found a safe." It had the look of something designed to protect its contents well. The cool surface was dark and rough, and gave almost no sound when Moss rapped it. There was no visible door, but it was tilted at an angle that suggested that the door was still buried.

"Great! Now we're both getting somewhere."

Moss tried to shift it by muscle, and found it too heavy for him. He went back to his pile of tools and wrestled out a lifter and his laser cutter. With equipment under each arm, he returned to the safe.

"Well? What's in it?"

"Give me a minute." Moss wedged the lifter under the lower end of the safe and stood back. The little machine began kicking up plumes of dust as it sought purchase in the loose soil. After a moment it reached a stable position and began slowly lifting. More dust slid off the sides of the safe as it was brought upright. Moss walked around to the side that had been underneath. As the lifter brought it up to a sixty-degree angle, the door emerged. Moss stepped forward.

The door swung open of itself, and gray dust spilled out in a great wash that stopped before Moss's feet. Unbalanced, the safe tilted to one side and slid off the top foot of the lifter. "Damn."

Vreeland's voice cut through the frustrated mechanical whirring. "I've got it open! Moss, it's incredible, this thing is just packed with stuff. They must have tried to cram their whole civilization into ten by sixteen."

Moss reached inside the safe. "Empty." Unexpectedly, he found himself disappointed.

"What? Your safe is empty?" Vreeland groaned. "That's crazy, how could he leave that beautiful bowl out, and then not save anything at all? Wasn't anything important to him?"

"Maybe not." Moss kicked the side of the safe and turned away. "Save it for what?" He squinted at the horizon. "What would be the point?" he muttered, unsure of whether he was asking it of Vreeland or of that stab of disappointment he felt.

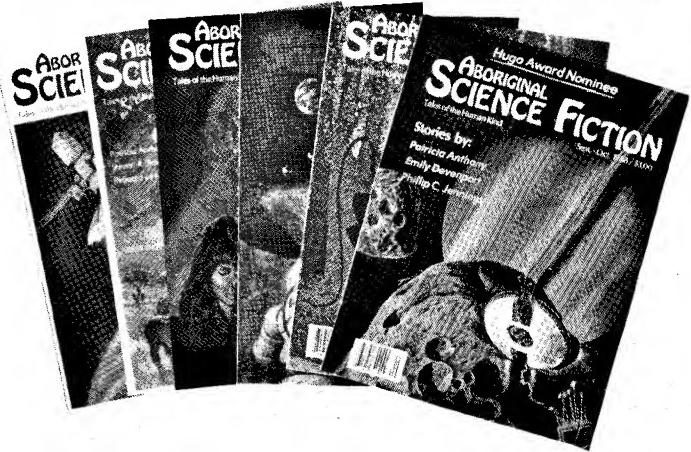
The communicator carried only the sound of Vreeland's movements. No answer, Moss thought, and returned to his own work. He continued his search.

"They seem to have arranged this chronologically," Vreeland said.

"Maybe they were expecting company." Moss's shovel thunked. He began to dig again, moving shovelfuls of dust and rubble. A bit of color against the gray caught his eye. He leaned down.

Blue; the color of the bowl. A fragment — perhaps there were other bowls below, still whole. He dropped to his knees and brushed the dust away more carefully. A flat surface was revealed; a large gray stone slab. More colored chips came up in his hands, and then a larger object began to emerge. He pulled it out.

It was a blue block of stone, the size of his two



We're running out of back issues

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fists. Turning it over, he saw a glimmer of yellow, saw how the shading of colors matched the bowl. It must have been carved from just such a stone.

"You know, I think they were expecting company, or at least hoping for it. It's like a museum in here. They've preserved samples of their whole culture, from beginning to end. I've got an axe here; it's not that different from what a stone-age human might have made. And further along — hand machines, electronic devices; I can't even guess what they might be for."

"Tools," said Moss, looking at the objects his hands were finding in the dust. "That's what they are."

"What?"

"Artist's tools," he said. They couldn't have been anything else. The stone still showed marks of their use. Chisels of several sizes, a rough-surfaced metal square — a sander, perhaps — and a short stick with odd depressions: the haft of a hammer shaped to alien hands.

He leaned back. "It was made here."

"What was?"

"The bowl."

He had her full attention now. "You mean you've got a workshop? The place must be littered with art. Even if nothing was saved on purpose, maybe something survived by accident, like that bowl — " she stopped short. "Why didn't he just put the bowl in the safe? It was right there."

"Save it, like your crowd did? What the hell's the point? He'd be dead just the same."

"Come on, Moss, if you think like that, what's the point of anything? Why would he make the bowl at all?"

"Especially" The thought came to Moss slow-

ly, and he turned it over in his mind, unbelieving. "Especially since he knew he was going to die any moment."

"What do you mean?"

Moss looked at the articles again. The tools, the bowl, and the stone it was made from — the very stone, Moss realized, with chips of it still not swept away from the slab — the artist's workbench. "He worked up to the last minute," Moss said. "He had just finished it."

"What are you talking about?"

He looked around the remains of the workshop, trying to imagine the strange artist, hurrying — or perhaps not hurrying, but working, carefully, aware of what was coming, and at last holding in his alien hand that small, perfect object —

Moss shook his head. "Never mind. It's not important."

Vreeland's voice was doubtful. "Well, fill me in later. I've got enough to figure out here. Artifacts, artworks — they've preserved everything. Hey, there's even a photograph." She fell silent.

Moss ignored her, ignored the communicator, ignored everything but the thought of the artist. He turned the bowl over and over in his hands abstractedly. His finger found a faint depression on the base. He bent closer.

"It's a photograph of the square," Vreeland continued. "This square. The obelisk. And all those people, all about to die, their hands are raised Moss, they're waving at the camera." She drew a breath. "It's the last thing they wanted to save, for anyone who might come after."

Moss traced the tiny mark lightly. It was so shallow it didn't mar the shape of the bowl, but it was there, clearly. A simple, distinctive symbol. "His signature," he muttered. But why sign it? To even make it, with the end so near, never intending to save it, and then to sign it ... If accident hadn't brought Moss here, what would have saved the artist's life from purposelessness?

"Moss, what's going on over therè?"

Helplessly, he had to ask. "Why would the artist sign it?"

She gave a simple answer. "Because it was his?"

The simple answer. It did not matter, and the artist had not cared, if anyone ever found the bowl. It was not for them he made it, and not for them he signed it. It was not the accidents of the future that justified the acts of the present.

"Moss, can you hear me?"

Unlike the photograph, the signature was not a greeting to the future, not an attempt to shout down the centuries. It was a simple statement. This is my name. This, my work, is myself.

The simple, sufficient answer.

"Moss, are you there? Are you all right?"

Moss looked around. He stood completely alone in a circle of gray, ankle-deep in the dust that covered the plain to the horizon. Above was a dome of cobalt blue, and in his hands the perfect mirror of that sky.

"Yes," he replied to the distant voice. "I'm here. I'm all right." □



Our next issue:

Larry Niven's "The Wishing Game" will highlight the May/June 1989 issue of *Aboriginal*. Set in the same universe as his *The Magic Goes Away*, the story puts a new twist on the genie in a bottle fable. We will also have the second installment of David Brin's essay on "Science and the Fantastic" and two appearances by our gonzo SF expert Robert A. Metzger, one serious, and one gonzo. The issue will also feature "Eating Memories," another moving story by Patricia Anthony, and as many more short stories as we can fit. Plus we'll have our usual book reviews and features.



Science and the Fantastic

By David Brin

Part I The Time Flow of Wisdom

Picture the mad magician, working alone in his tower, cackling to himself over his new discovery. "I'll show them," he murmurs. "I'll show them all! I don't need anybody. I'll do it all myself!" ... Then he realizes his eye of newt supply has spoiled. Grumbling at the delay, he invokes a sprite to go get him some more. "I don't need anybody!" he cries.

Now picture the mad scientist, working alone in his tower, cackling to himself over his new discovery. "I'll show them," he murmurs. "I'll show them all! I don't need anybody. I'll do it all myself!" ... Then a transistor blows in his apparatus. Grumbling at the delay, he reaches for the parts catalog and starts dialing the number of the supply company ... "I don't need anybody," he grumbles, "except Edmund Scientific, and the phone company ..." He looks up as the lights flicker. "And the electric company"

In all of history, no system of thought has changed humanity as much as science. It has brought power and wealth to our lives, and great danger as well. The answers to many of the questions which mystified our ancestors are now freely available to anybody who can read or tune in PBS. This expansion and opening of knowledge has helped bring about a new thing called "equality" in a species once wedded to strict patterns of inherited authority.

And yet, in the midst of this renaissance, one hears again and again the question, "Does science provide everything we need?" Quite often the reply is a resounding "No!"

Take the so-called "New Age" movement, for instance — encompassing everything from astrology to past life regression to colon hydrotherapy. It engages the time and attention of many in our modern culture. The Shirley MacLaine phenomenon is just one example as would-be gurus rush to cater to those wanting more than science alone appears to offer.

Most readily admit the positive accomplishments of technology. (They'd hate to do without their hot tubs and CD players.) They insist, however, that there are realms "inaccessible to rational thought."

This attitude may have been distilled best by the writer, Tom Robbins, in "Another Roadside Attraction," in which a minor character explains sagely that "Science gives man what he needs, but *magic* gives man what he wants!"

The conflict is almost as old as science itself. In the 18th Century, men such as George Washington — followers of the "Enlightenment" — wrote movingly of their deep belief in the imminent maturity of humankind. With the old feudal ways splitting asunder, how could anything but Truth prevail?

Although the Enlightenment did change humanity forever, any of its followers who expected the immediate maturation of

mankind were doomed to disappointment — not only because they underestimated the amount yet to be done, but also because each successful generation inevitably nurtures its own critics. Just as Washington and Franklin took joy in toppling the tyranny of Church and King, so the boys and girls of the *Romantic Movement*, only a generation later, took pleasure in jeering the lofty ideals of *their* predecessors.

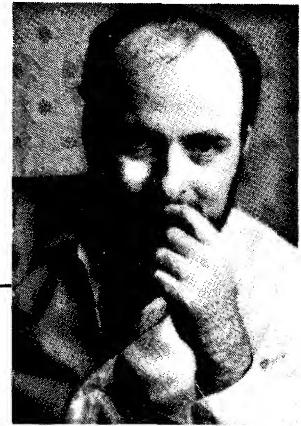
"What good is reason," the Romantics sneered, "if it drives out beauty and terror and vivid emotion?"

Heady stuff; Shelley and Byron and all their crowd attracted a lot of attention. For the Romantics did seem to harken to inner needs apparently left unsatisfied by the cool pace of reason.

The debate is one we've inherited today. .

Right now, in the field of science fiction and fantasy, there are representatives of both sides of this grand dichotomy. Both sides have contributed to our past and present. Those proclaiming that SF is solely a literature of reason fail to recognize that its foundations rest not only on the erector-set ribwork of 1920s radio magazines, but also upon the grisly, sewn-up ribcage of Frankenstein.

Romanticism in SF need not refer only to baroque horror or fantasy. The so-called *cyberpunks* carry on in the same tradition as Shelley and Poe. Writers of cyberpunk reject as sterile and inhuman any tomorrow based solely on knowledge and reason.



In this respect their appeal is similar to that of New Age gurus. Both extol the vivid and the subjective. Both label rationalism a soul-killing enterprise.

Most cyberpunks do respect the power of technology. They make broad use of emblems and metaphors which seem outwardly to be about "high tech." In much the same way, New Age enthusiasts use rhythms of speech which mimic the polysyllabic language of science. They speak of "fields" and "magnetic energy domains" as they wave their hands and shape auras in space. Even those who despise scientists admit the profession will play a vital role in humanity's future.

And to be fair, this tolerance isn't reciprocated from the other side. Oh, there are physicists who read the sutras, or study Zen, or speculate in print about theology. But most are flat-out antagonistic to the claims of New Age mystics and gurus. If the romantics call rationalism soul-killing, the latter-day children of the Enlightenment call Romanticism mind-melting drivel.

Is this all just about name-calling? Or is there a *fundamental* conflict between these world views? Between science and all the realms that might be called "magical"? Let's consider the matter of the *Time Sense of Wisdom*, or whether one looks more to the past or to the future as the ultimate source of truth.

Until very recent times, nearly every society on the planet shared a central myth-belief — that men and women were once greater than they are now, that there was a Golden Age in which heroes flew and were given (or had to fight for) fire and knowledge from the gods. Rules and strictures handed down from those long lost days varied from tribe to tribe, but in each case they were the True Word, not to be criticized by the likes of mere contemporary women and men.

What a major break it was, then, when a new philosophy took hold which said: "No, we are *increasing* our knowledge as we move forward through time. Next

year's texts and journals will contain better models of the world, models which are marginally improved over this year's. And the year after that we'll know better still."

There really can be little or no compromise between these two views of time and wisdom. For if the *Look Forward* view predominates, it means that even the greatest ancient lore must give over its secrets to public scrutiny sooner or later, and then be surpassed.

Suppose, for instance, that Nancy Reagan is right. There is something to astrology.

Now, the Babylonians may have known much more about the topic than we do now. But the "look forward" mentality confidently predicts that once we finally do turn our attention to the subject — engage in serious research — those Mesopotamian tomes are doomed to obsolescence ... to be revered only in a historical sense, no longer as prime sources. One might say this is what has already become of *many* of the Old Books once held to be immutably perfect and unsurpassable.

This concept is truly scary to some. The thing which attracted them to astrology, or fundamentalist religion, or mysticism, in the first place was the feeling that they were drawing from ancient wisdom that would not, *could not* change. The ephemeral, ever-improving, but never perfect world-models of science *frighten* some people.

This means that we are not talking about *shades* of difference here, but a split that is gaping and profound.

Let's try another metaphor for this conflict.

Once upon a time, Faerie, the land of shadows and fantastical creatures, lay not far from anyone's back door. But in recent centuries the borders of that magical realm have shrunk. One must search hard and far and wide for any traces, and even those are dubious.

Now, this *could* be because Faerie never really existed at all,

except in our own minds. On the other hand, it could be that the land of demons and nymphs and elves had reality once, but has contracted ... contracted because of a *change* in our minds.

What if, in developing the skeptical view encouraged by science, we humans somehow became *deadly* to all things fantastic? What if the skeptical gaze turned out to sear the very substance of Faerie creatures?

Picture, then, the poor ogres and giants, shriveling back in smoky ruin as a band of horrid monsters — students on a nature trail tour — come peering and pointing into murky forest recesses, sending the ravening beams of their curiosity into crannies their great-grandparents would have superstitiously left alone.

Not only have these monsters (modern human beings) taken over most of the globe, they still aren't satisfied! They compete with each other, seeking out the farthest reaches, those high redoubts into which Faerie's refugees might have fled. Not the fastness of the Himalayas, nor the blackberry thickets of Oregon, nor the depths of the deepest loch are safe from these rapacious searchers who, alert for any sign of Yeti or Nessie or Bigfoot, burn out those creatures' last traces of existence with their eager, searching eyes!

An extravagant metaphor. And yet, is it not in a way valid? As we saw, the Look-Forward and Look-Back views of wisdom's flow are essentially incompatible. If the former prevails, the latter fails, utterly. We cannot be both trained naturalists and dryad worshippers, much as both love trees.

Consider this provocative proposition ... that Western Civilization has made only *one* contribution to human enlightenment, which can be summed up in the following statement.

"Subjective and Objective reality aren't the same. Everything I think I

(Continued to page 46)

The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After

By Gerald Perkins

Art by Byron Taylor

Let me tell you of the Three: the Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After. Ah, I thought you might like that story. Mind you, it's not finished yet, not in my here/now or yours. A little of it I know. Some of it happened here on Mitre's World.

The beginning, well, that is in a where/when far distant. In the beginning, Hestros the Runner befriended Three Bright Lines. Now that was unusual because Three Bright Lines was of the Scaled Folk, and Scaled Folk and Humanity have never gotten along well.

Three Bright Lines was a chameleon from a world bright with color. His folk lived in trees where their six limbs let them dart along in jeweled flashes. When he stood on his back legs, he was as tall as a human boy.

Three Bright Lines told Hestros, "There will be another, one for the third line on my back." The third was Amelia from Dusthaven, that strange world circling a star in the midst of a dark nebula.

Hestros and Amelia were ordinary looking humans, Hestros with light brown skin and dark brown hair and eyes, Amelia with darker skin and hair and eyes black as a nightbird's plumes. Though Amelia was from a noble family on Dusthaven and Hestros from a merchant clan on a minor world, they fell in love. They fell in love as humans do, which is not the casual mating of some species, nor life bonding, nor yet the seasonal needs of others. No, their love was of the human sort; tender and tempestuous, cruel and kind, and strong — strong enough to see them through many strange quirks of the yet-to-be.

Amelia and Hestros loved Three Bright Lines as a friend. He held onto that love with all six limbs and his tail. And gave it back in full measure.

They quickly became known all along this galactic arm and into the next. Even the surface-bound know of the Three Friends. They saved the Ghost

Fleet. Only they could have seen deeply enough, walked slowly enough, danced carefully enough to find so small a mass as a thousand slow ships lost between stars.

Step slowly, you say? Ah, that is the riddle of the star walkers: Why must they, who cover light years in a step or ripple or wing beat, move slowly? It is like this: the trick of mind that lets a star walker cheat the law of light has its own price. A star walker taps unimaginable power. If he moves slowly, keeps his balance in the measures the stars dance, the power will take him between the stars. If he loses his balance, or moves too fast, the power will consume him and, possibly, the stars around him. Oh yes, it is a very great danger, but not to walk is a kind of slow death.

The star worlds need the walkers. Without them commerce, knowledge, sometimes help, would be limited to the slow ships.

Hestros was carrying medicine to a world suffering from plague when he stumbled.

Think yourself small in the dark between the stars and the stars, whose color depends on their mass, points far away. Or think yourself huge and the stars still far away. Think yourself walking/dancing a faint path on thin ice over dark water. Think winter winds, invigorating and dangerous.

If your path crumbled, what would you do? Catch yourself, of course. That's what Hestros did. To catch himself, he broke his pattern, and moved faster. He improvised steps to regain his rhythm. His path crumbled more under the strain. He moved even faster.

By the time he could think beyond his next step, he was running.

There was a star cluster, his destination, in his



way.

Hestros looked at his yet-to-be's and knew that he would lose control in that cluster. Instead of bringing life, he would bring death. Death from plague or death from supernova is death all the same and walkers are pledged to life. So he did the only thing he could think of:

Hestros stepped on a black hole.

Do not laugh, do not laugh! I said Hestros stepped on a black hole, not in one.

If Hestros had stepped into the black hole, he would have died. Black holes, though, throw away nine parts of every ten they gather. Hestros' energy dispersed by the hole would have been as bad for the stars he approached as his own uncontrolled arrival.

Hestros stepped on the black hole accretion disk. He stepped on it against the direction of spin. The light from that collision will be seen in that cluster in half a hundred human years. It will be a glorious sight, almost as glorious as Hestros' pack, which arrived in perfect condition at the Walkers' House on the plague world.

What happened to Hestros? Well, he changed his direction. He stopped running. But he left the singularity at speeds no walker has ever attained.

He went to the edge of all there is.

He went to the end of yet-to-be.

He improvised a pattern and very, very slowly, he started back.

Three Bright Lines knew when Hestros was lost, for he was the one who saw deeply in spacetime. He bent his here/now to match Hestros' there/then and walked Hestros' path. When he reached the black hole, he went to meet his friend.

Amelia knew Hestros was lost when the pattern of her dance was disturbed, for she was the one who walked most lightly. She finished her dance, delivered her messages, and set out after Hestros and Three Bright Lines.

When the Three met, Three Bright Lines stole some of Hestros' energy and gave it to a dying galaxy. Amelia stole some of Hestros' energy and gave it to a cloud of cold hydrogen a thousand times larger than the Milky Way. They did this again and again until they could talk to Hestros.

But Hestros had been to the Edge and the End. One who has been there is not firmly anchored to the Greater Pattern by which we know the universe.

Three Bright Lines and Amelia consulted as they wove their patterns so that they could drain excess energy from Hestros without being consumed. They consulted and Three Bright Lines looked deep along all the possible yet-to-bes that he could see for Hestros. Then Amelia danced them to Mitre's World. They arrived in separate here/nows.

Three Bright Lines put on a seeming when he arrived, for that is a survival talent of his species, and went looking for someone. He didn't know who he was looking for, only what. He found a town called Drayer's Bend and a boy named Brian.

Brian was a handsome boy of twelve human years, large for his age, with light yellow hair, blue

eyes, and an inquiring mind. He was fascinated by the new boy in school. The new boy was quiet and polite and knew enough answers to keep the teachers happy, but not so many that the other younglings didn't like him. Three Bright Lines, even in his seeming, had a way of sitting perfectly still, then moving in quick darts that somehow looked slow. He had a way of knowing if you had a problem like a skinned knee you didn't want your mother to know about. He always had answers for those problems. And he always carried a small black box or large book with him.

Brian loved to climb. So did Three Bright Lines. When Brian found that out, they became fast friends. Soon there was not one tree, rock, or wall unclimbed in Drayer's Bend.

One day, while they were sunning after a climb, Three Bright Lines said, "Would you like to read my book?"

Brian's hands trembled as Three Bright Lines showed him how to open the book. What a marvel! There were more pages than should possibly fit between those covers and each one spoke to him. Sometimes there was only a word or a picture that meant anything, but each page had something for him. When he got to the back of the book, the cover was still thick. Three Bright Lines wouldn't tell him if there was anything else in the wonderful book, so he turned back to the front. Right there on the first page it said, "This Is A Book About How Living Things Work And How To Fix Them If They Break." And that was the most marvelous thing Brian had ever thought about. He read until it was time to go home for supper.

The next day Three Bright Lines let Brian read the book some more. He begged Three Bright Lines so often to read it that Three Bright Lines finally let him take the book home.

Then Three Bright Lines disappeared. He went to help Amelia bring Hestros to Mitre's World, but to Brian he vanished. Brian missed his friend. At the same time he was afraid that if Three Bright Lines ever came back, he would demand his book.

For Brian, yet-to-be turned into there/then. He grew from a child to a young adult. Every time he read part of the book, he understood more. The book showed him a way to look at living things and tell if they were working properly. People began coming to him because, person or beast or even plant, he could tell if something was wrong. More and more often he could say how to fix whatever was wrong.

Then came the explosion.

Brian had taken to going far from Drayer's Bend to be alone, for there were more things that needed fixing than there were hours in his day. He saw the earth swell up silently before him like a pond when a rock is dropped into it. After that came the bright light and heat. And after that came the thunderclap. Later, the wise men from the university in Mitre's Town said otherwise, but Brian was there.

Brian pulled himself out of the prickle bushes where the ground wave had tossed him, brushed dirt from his tunic and trousers, checked that the book was safely in his pack, and started up the new hill. He had to stop at the crest. Beyond him the ground had been turned into a bowl more than 300 paces across. The

center of the bowl was glowing hot! And the heat was spreading! He had to shift and dance as the ground under his boots began to steam. That was how the Starbowl, from which this city takes its name, came to be.

Brian saw a man at the bottom of the bowl. He expected the man to burn instantly, but he didn't. Brian looked at the stranger in his special way and saw that he was broken. The heat kept Brian from going into the bowl while his curiosity kept him dancing on the edge. When he smelled his boots and clothing smoldering, he ran down the hill. The first thing he checked when he got to a nearby stream was that his book was still in his pack.

Imagine his surprise when he turned and saw a woman and a lizard with four legs and two arms carrying the broken man out of the bowl. The woman and the lizard were no more harmed by the heat than the broken man, though the wall of the bowl was now glowing halfway down its sides. Brian knew then that these were star walkers. He guessed that the heat was from the broken walker and that Mitre's World was in deadly danger.

He stared at the trio as they approached. No bird or reptile sang; no insect stirred. The only sounds were the chuckle of the brook, the footsteps of the walkers, and a faint hissing from the bowl.

He stared as the woman and the lizard man laid the injured star walker at his feet. He stared at the woman when Three Bright Lines stood on his rear legs and said, "Hi, Brian, been reading my book?" He stared at Amelia and said nothing.

What have I said about Amelia? That she was darker than Hestros? She was, but not as dark as the humans of Dun. She could easily have vanished in any city on Mitre's World. So could Hestros. Brian would have stood out more.

Brian did not think any of these things. He stared at Amelia and knew that this was the woman he would want for all his life. At the same time he knew she was not for him, not a walker for a surface-bound.

Amelia saw the love on Brian's face. She smiled sadly when she said, "Three Bright Lines says you must be a great healer by now, Brian. Will you heal Hestros for me?"

Then Brian looked at Hestros again. He saw those things he could fix and those he could not.

"I will do what I can," he said.

They took Hestros to a deserted farm beyond the Starbowl. Brian did what he could for Hestros and then went for supplies. When he came back, Three Bright Lines showed him how to open the back of the book. Hidden in the thick binding were otherworldly medicines. Because he had read the book, Brian knew what they were. Because he was a true healer, he knew how to use them.

Two days later Hestros opened his eyes, smiled at Amelia, and went to sleep. At that instant the Starbowl began to cool.

Brian looked at Hestros and saw that he had done all he could. He looked at Three Bright Lines and saw he was healthy. He looked at Amelia and almost cried out. Brian saw that she was pregnant.

He spent the next ten days at the old farm, return-

ing to his home for sleep and more supplies. Other humans noticed, of course, and some eventually followed him, but Brian didn't see them. To be near Amelia was such a joy and such a hurt that he paid no attention to anything else.

Three Bright Lines was the only one to greet him on the tenth day. He hugged Brian with his first four limbs. He pulled him down until they could touch noses. "Don't do any climbing until I come back," Three Bright Lines said. Then he darted around Brian to the front entrance. When Brian got there, he couldn't find any trace of Three Bright Lines, nor did any of the hidden watchers see the lizard man leave.

Brian's parents explained his peculiar behavior as a need for privacy. He didn't argue. Things went back to normal except that the humans of Mitre's World let their greatest healer have more time to himself.

More yet-to-bes turned to there/thens for Brian. He became a mature human male. His fame as a healer spread until even some of the star walkers came to him. He took many students, was able to teach some of them his special way of seeing, but none could read his book. He never took a mate. Oh, some of his students loved him in the human way, but he could not love them. Amelia was always, as humans say, in his heart.

Then Amelia came back.

Yes, she did. No, she didn't come back because she loved Brian. She didn't even know him. She didn't know him because on her time line she had not yet met him. For Amelia, in her here/now, she and Three Bright Lines had met Hestros for the first time on his way back from the Edge and the End. Three Bright Lines had left them and returned and separated from them again as she danced to Mitre's Worlds. She was sad and tired and she missed Three Bright Lines. She knew from the Pattern that Hestros was near in spacetime. She was surprised when a handsome male began courting her.

If Amelia was surprised, Brian was stunned. He guessed why she didn't know him and resolved to win her before she met his younger self at the making of Starbowl. That is foolish if you stop to think about it. However, no human male pursuing a female ever does think that clearly. Brian courted Amelia until Hestros appeared.

Amelia walked the streets of Drayer's Bend. People stepped aside because she was not wholly in the here/now as she searched for Hestros.

Brian neglected his practice to walk with her. When he spoke to her, she answered politely. When he showed her the most pleasant parts of town, she scanned them for Hestros. He took her to the best eating places. She ate and drank for nourishment. When she exhausted herself, he took her to his house, but she slept alone, waking quickly to continue her search.

Amelia borrowed a horse and rode the land around Drayer's Bend. Brian followed her, treasuring each brief, distracted smile, each moment of interest as he pointed out a shy flower or a spreading vista. For one whole cycle of Mitre's World's larger moon he courted Amelia. For thirty-two days he bruised his spirit for her smiles and her distant thanks.

Hestros arrived when Amelia was alone. She felt him flick into the here/now as she passed a bakery. She took a sticky bun and ran down the street with the baker shouting after her.

She found Hestros sitting on the bank of the river that bent around the town. He was sitting very still, watching insects dart above the sun-sparkling water. She sat next to him under a tree that shaded them from the afternoon warmth.

"Hello, Hestros," she said.

Hestros smiled the bright, innocent smile of a child. "Hello, pretty lady," he replied.

"Do you know me, Hestros?" Amelia asked. Her spirit dimmed when he shook his head. "Would you like some of my sticky bun?"

"My Mommy told me not to take food from people I don't know."

"That's all right, Hestros, I know you."

"Really?" Hestros grabbed the half of the bun she offered him. "Who'm I?" he asked through the bread.

Amelia knew then that this was Hestros only a little way along his own life line from the hurt of the Edge and the End (though she did not know he made the Starbowl). She could see that his body had been partially healed. She guessed what Three Bright Lines had done when he left them after he looked deep at Hestros' might-be's.

"You're Hestros ..." she began.

"Yeah, I'm a star walker an' I'm sitting very still." His face glowed with happiness as he said that.

Amelia wanted to cry. "Why are you sitting very still, Hestros?"

"'Cause if I move, I'll break something — something big, an' that would be bad." He frowned. "Or maybe I'll break me?" Tears suddenly rolled down his face. "I don't wanna break!"

Amelia wiped his tears away, full of sadness beyond tears. "I know a man who can fix you," she said, "and make it so you won't break the big thing. I can take you to him."

"I'd like that!" Hestros started to clap his hands and quickly stopped. "But I can't move!" he wailed.

"It's all right, it's all right," soothed Amelia. "You can move if you don't move fast."

The people of Drayer's Bend stared at Amelia and Hestros as they walked slowly through town. It took them all afternoon to get to Brian's house.

Brian met them in the warm golden light of his empty receiving room. Hestros smiled at him, warm and trusting. Amelia smiled tremulously.

"Will you help him, Brian? Will you help him for the good he has done, for what he has suffered, for the good he will do?"

Amelia quailed as Brian's face twisted in rage and

love, hate and pity. Hestros cried out, burying his face against her neck. Brian walked across the room, shoulders shaking. He hit the wall once with his fist. When he turned back, his expression was calm.

"No," he said. "I will help him because you love him. I will help him because he is Three Bright Lines' friend."

Brian had grown in knowledge and wisdom along his own life line. He poured all he knew, all his pain, all his love into healing Hestros' body. He worked three days without rest or nourishment. He slept a day and a night afterward.

Brian kept Hestros in his home for five more days. They were not happy days for him. With his body healed, Hestros' mind became clear and he knew Amelia. On the last day, Brian came on them unexpectedly. They were doing those things humans do to make offspring. Brian fled his home. He almost tripped over Three Bright Lines, who was sunning himself in the garden.

"Let's go climb some trees," said Three Bright Lines.

They did. They went to the edge of the town where old trees still grew. Brian in his doctor's clothes and Three Bright Lines in his sparkling scales climbed trees until Mitre's Sun was bisected by the horizon. Then Three Bright Lines begged Brian's forgiveness for what he had done.

"Hestros had to be healed," he said, "or worlds would have died. My friend would have died. He needed a great healer; one with a great heart. I looked deep and saw you."

"The child you saw being made is made from love and necessity. Hestros and Amelia love one another as neither you nor I can understand. In making the child, Hestros has given a bit of himself irretrievably to another. That will anchor him to the Greater Pattern. Now Amelia and I will go to the making of the Starbowl and bring him to you the first time."

Brian nodded, for a healer must be wise in many things and he had suspected the truth despite his heart's pain. "I forgive you, my friend. Visit me from time to time and tell me about the child."

Three Bright Lines waved his fingers through the winds between the stars then. He looked deep and smiled a lizard smile. One last time they touched noses. Brian watched Three Bright Lines begin his slow walk between the stars. If the salt water in his eyes was not all from the brightness he saw before Three Bright Lines vanished, well, that is part of the Greatest Pattern.

When Brian returned home, Three Bright Lines was waiting for him. He handed the doctor a child wrapped in soft clothes. Brian looked and saw that he held a perfect human female less than a year old. He looked at Three Bright Lines, knowledge in his eyes.

"Her name is Chandra," said Three Bright Lines, "'She Who Outshines the Stars.' Amelia and Hestros had the first part of her story. You have the second." Then he darted around a corner of Brian's home and was gone.

Brian looked from where his friend had vanished to the youngling in his arms. "Hello," he said, "Starbright." □

Moving?

We expect our subscribers to move, but if you want to get your next issue of *Aboriginal* please tell us 45 days before the next issue is due out. For instance, the next issue will be mailed about March 15, so if you are moving please tell us by Feb. 1 what your new address will be. The post office will not always forward second-class mail.





ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

Sisters

In the essay "Science and the Fantastic," author **David Brin** explores the "grand dichotomy" between romance and reason, magic and machines, represented by the art of science fiction.

Brin, an astrophysicist by training, burst on the science fiction scene in 1979 with the first fiction he ever submitted, the novel *Sundiver*.



Larry Blamire

He recently won his second Hugo award for the 1987 novel *The Uplift War*. His first was for *Startide Rising* in 1983, which also won a Nebula and a Locus Award.

Brin is now working on his eighth book, *Earth*, a "B-I-I-G" novel about guess where," fifty years in the future.

The Los Angeles resident spends his spare time giving public lectures, volunteering in a gifted student program and staying involved with SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence).

Our cover art is by frequent contributor **Larry Blamire**, for the story "So It Is Written," by **Paul Edwards**.

Blamire is the same artist who depicted the diabolical Reverend Walker of **Robert A. Metzger's** "A

Third Chance" for the cover of the May-June 1988 issue.

When I spoke to Larry in December, he was in his actor's mode, portraying a textile magnate in the play "Murder at Rutherford House" at the Wilbur Theater in Boston.

The play is a 1940s British-style whodunit where the audience participates in trying to solve the mystery. It was in the third month of an open-ended run.

Blamire said he had set aside his playwriting until after the holidays.

"So It Is Written" marks Paul Edwards' second appearance in *Aboriginal*. His first story for us was "Sunshine Delight" in the March-April 1988 issue.

Edwards says he got the idea for "So It Is Written" after reading an encyclopedia of all of mankind's religious beliefs and wondering what a society would be like that was centered around such encyclopedia



Paul Edwards

knowledge.

Edwards says he wrote the story on a friend's kitchen table using a



Rosemary Kirstein

Remington portable, a "wonderful" change of pace from his "tremendously more efficient" home computer.

His short story "Desert in Faerie" recently appeared in *The Green Egg*, and he is now working on a novel of magical adventure in the time of Louis XIV of France, an era that Edwards says "hasn't even begun to be tapped," Alexandre Dumas notwithstanding.

"Salvage," a story of artistry and the human soul, is written by **Rosemary** and **Sabine Kirstein**. I do believe it is our first story written by sisters.

I asked Sabine how they did it, living in Queens and Jersey City, respectively, at the time.

She said they wrote the story during visits, with one sitting at the typewriter and the other talking. "Each word was debated," Sabine said.

Nevertheless, they enjoyed the experience and want to do more with



Sabine Kirstein

those characters. It might be easier now that they're both living at their parents' home in Connecticut.

This was Sabine's first short story. She makes her living as a medical technologist.

Rosemary is a computer consultant, but lately she's made more money as a "hot fingerpicking guitarist and songwriter" and science fiction writer.

Rosemary's first short story appeared in the July 1982 *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. She just finished her first novel, called *The Steerswoman*, and is "still a little stunned" that Del Rey will be

publishing it next fall.

"Salvage" is illustrated by Larry Blamire.

Robert A. Metzger is the author of four *Aboriginal* stories, including "Unfit to Print" (Nov.-Dec. 1988) and "An Unfiltered Man," (Sept.-Oct. 1987), which have been bizarrely humorous in a style he calls "gonzo" SF.

Now Metzger makes a switch to the bizarrely serious with "In the Shadow of Bones."

Bob says he is elated about having attracted the attention of noted literary agent **Richard Curtis**, who is now handling Metzger's first novel, *John Smith and Associates*.

Metzger says the novel contains perhaps the most disgusting character he has ever created. I'll give you just a hint. Necro Ned is five feet tall, 400 pounds, and instead of wearing clothes, he likes to staple hundreds of rats and mice to his body and only replaces them when they rot and fall off.

Metzger fans know this author has a penchant for deranged characters, and his novel is full of them.

"In the Shadow of Bones" is illustrated by **Pat Morrissey**.

Besides doing lots of work for us, such as the cover of the Nov.-Dec. 1988 issue, Morrissey is working on her first book cover.

Her art will adorn **Orson Scott Card's** *The Seventh Son* for the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club.

Morrissey says before this she had done some jacket illustration for Easton Press. Luckily, her planetarium projects were not due until January, because Doubleday called

her up around Thanksgiving and asked her to do the cover in just two weeks.

"The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After" is written by **Gerald Perkins**, who is making his *Aboriginal* debut.



Gerald Perkins

Perkins told me he usually doesn't like the stories he reads in *Aboriginal*, but that could change.

Perkins makes his living as a quality engineer. His short story "Drum Duel" appears in **Marion Zimmer Bradley's** *Sword and Sorceress V* anthology. Now he's working on a novel and several short stories.



Byron Taylor

Perkins devotes a lot of time to working for BayCon, which was held last year in San Jose, California, on Labor Day weekend. He says the local SF convention is getting a lot of favorable notice from fans and pros who've attended, and it's growing rapidly.



Pat and Wayne Morrissey



DE WODCASTER

Shadow

(Continued from page 7)

wind that saved me from the geyser, and the wind was God's doing.

"Never," I whispered.

Femur-Left Leg
Day 352

The garage smelled musty and feral. Judging by the droppings and debris, I could tell that rats, rabbits, and at least several cats had made this place their home in the past year.

"I'm surprised this made your list, Nicky."

Nicky said nothing. The backpack was perched against the garage wall, nestled between shovels and pruning shears. I knew he was listening, though — I could hear his bones rattle. He hadn't spoken to me for days, not since we had crossed the Mississippi at Hannibal, Missouri, where we'd visited Mark Twain's home. He was mad about something.

I sat cross-legged on the warm concrete floor, munching a Rome Beauty, and trying to ignore him.

"The largest ball of yarn in Illinois," I read aloud as I crossed the entry off.

It sat in the far corner of the garage next to a pile of paint cans. Made up mostly of yellow and green strands, it couldn't have been over four feet in diameter. It was no longer quite round, but had sagged, probably after having been rained and snowed on. There was a fist-sized hole in the garage roof directly above it. Glancing up through that hole, I could see neither blue sky nor white clouds. The world was red, the sunlight being filtered through the countless Aliens that hovered over Barry, Illinois.

I started to stand.

"We're leaving."

"Haven't you forgotten something?"

I jumped inside, but stood slowly and smoothly. I wasn't about to give Nicky the satisfaction.

"I haven't forgotten a thing."

I walked across the garage, giving a plastic sack of fertilizer a hard kick. I damn near broke my toe, but kept walking. Suddenly bones rattled, and I heard something snap.

"What are you doing, Nicky?" I asked, trying to sound calm.

My hand hovered over the pack, but I was afraid to touch it. The garage filled with the sounds of crunching bones.

"Nicky!"

"You have to leave a bone here."

Crackling sounds continued to come from the pack.

"Not here," I said. "This place isn't good enough." There were less than fifty bones left. I wasn't about to waste one on a four-foot ball of yarn. Nicky deserved better.

"And the other places. Why weren't they good enough?"

I tried to make a grab for the pack, but something within it shattered, sounding like the breaking of glass.

"The Sears Tower? Mt. Rushmore? Mark Twain's home?"

I said nothing. There was nothing I could say.

"You started this, and you're going to finish it. You're not backing out on this promise."

"You don't understand, Nicky."

The pack was silent for several seconds. Nicky was thinking. I could feel him think. "What happens to you, Rick, when the last bone is gone?"

He knew. He could read my mind. When the last of Nicky was gone, I'd be alone in a world filled with a billion Aliens. And God wouldn't even let me die. We both knew the truth now.

"You promised."

I could hear bones grind together, knowing that they were being reduced to dust. It was blackmail. If I didn't leave a piece of him behind, Nicky'd destroy himself, and I'd be alone all that much sooner.

"Nicky?"

The snap of bones was his only answer.

I yanked at the pack's straps and, reaching in, pulled out the largest bone I could grab — a femur from his left leg. I hurled it at the ball of yarn, where it ricocheted off, then landed in the pile of paint cans. A rat squealed.

"Satisfied?"

He didn't answer. I grabbed the pack and, yanking back the flap, looked in. Not a single bone was splintered, not even cracked. He had tricked me.

I walked outside. Barry, Illinois, was tinted blood red.

Skull
Day 539

Tears had etched black trenches down Abraham Lincoln's cheeks. He sat silently, motionlessly, staring at me from invisible eyes that were hidden within dark sockets.

"Cross it off the list, Rick."

Lincoln's left hand was gone. His shattered fingers lay strewn across the marble floor.

"Cross it off the list, and move on, Rick."

But he wasn't alone any longer. Nicky's skull sat nestled in his lap. Lincoln would never be alone. He was the lucky one.

"We're done at the Lincoln Memorial, Rick."

I looked down at the list, and then felt it drop from my hand. There was no reason to pick it up. When you're on the pathway to Hell, you don't need a list.

I looked one last time at Lincoln. "Why's he so sad, Nicky?"

"He's not sad, Rick. He's just so very tired."

I nodded. I understood.

Turning, I walked down the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and onto the street that led to the Arlington Memorial Bridge. The path was chosen for me. God had seen to that. A deal had been struck. When the last of Nicky was gone, and God was done with my punishment, He would give me up to the Aliens. And after the Aliens had taken my bones, they would deliver me to Hell.

The Aliens lined the street, over a hundred deep,

and rose high above me so that only a narrow gray ribbon of sky was visible. I walked down a bloodstained canyon, out over the Potomac, heading for the entrance to Hell.

"It's almost over now, Rick."

Nicky was right. There were only five bones left in the backpack. I was only five bones away from Hell.

Second Lumbar Vertebra Day 712

It wasn't the river Styx, and Cerberus, the three-headed dog that guarded the gates, was nowhere to be seen, but there was no doubt in my mind. I had arrived.

Nicky was little more than a distant whisper now, a stubby piece of backbone in the front pocket of my frayed blue jeans. This would be the last spot, and my last day on Earth. Tomorrow I would wake in Hell. I welcomed it.

For over a month now, I had walked in a red tunnel formed by the bodies of a trillion Aliens. The sun had been little more than a diffuse amber glow, barely visible through their crystalline bodies. But this morning the tunnel had opened. That's how I knew that I had arrived at the gates of Hell.

Still standing at the exit of the crystal tunnel, I could smell salt water. A cool breeze whipped at my shoulder-length hair. Years ago, I had once stood on this very spot. The huge span, the cables, and the brick towers were all so familiar. But the roadbed of the Brooklyn Bridge was no longer paved with pot-hole-riddled cracked asphalt. The final pathway that would take me to Hell was paved with bones.

Stepping forward, I looked out across the East River. The stone canyons of Manhattan were gone. New York City had vanished, and in its place was a lone white pillar, dazzling white in reflected sunlight, reaching up into the sky. It was a tombstone for the world. This was where the Aliens had brought the bones of five billion dead.

"You must go to the top, Rick," Nicky whispered from my pants pocket.

I had known that, the instant I had seen the pillar. Before the Aliens would send me to Hell, they would first take my bones while I stood atop the dead world.

"Now, Rick."

I stepped onto the bone-paved bridge. The dead reached up for me, sucking the warmth from my body, and would have happily ripped out my soul had I still owned it. I walked forward.

My hand shook, but I was able to touch the pillar. Beneath a thin veneer of cold crystal were stacked the bones of a dead world. It was perhaps a hundred feet in diameter, but even by craning my neck back, and peering up into the sky, I couldn't tell how tall it was. The pillar didn't so much end, as simply blur and fade away.

"Enter."

The voice was cold and emotionless. It had not sounded like a voice that belonged to the dead, but

more like the voice of something that had never lived.

A panel of bone opened, revealing a tunnel that was bathed in chalk-white light.

"Enter."

I didn't look back.

It was warm inside. The air tasted dry and antiseptic. I walked slowly, softly, running my hands along the sides of the tunnel, feeling the roughness of the walls that conformally covered the bones beneath. The tunnel quickly ended at a small raised pedestal of red crystal.

"Enter."

"I'm scared, Rick," whispered Nicky.

I stepped up onto the pedestal. Above me, bored through this pillar of bone, was a shaft that rose into the milky-white light.

"Hold."

From between my feet, a filament of red crystal extended itself, the slender stalk rising up to my waist, bisecting itself, then sprouting two hand-sized grips. I grabbed hold.

My stomach dropped, and my vision momentarily tunneled. The bone wall of the shaft sped by, rapidly transforming itself into a featureless sheet of white nothingness.

"Exit."

I stepped from the pedestal. Bone reflected incandescent white in the stark sunlight. Unflickering stars filled a black sky.

"Where are we, Rick?"

I walked forward to the edge of the pillar. A nearly translucent crystal barrier that probably held in air and heat kept me from walking to the very edge and stepping off into the dark void.

The Earth curved beneath me. Blues, greens and whites ran to the distant horizon. We were in space, perhaps a hundred miles up, standing on the bones of five billion people. And as I watched the world below me, there was movement. Like fireflies, but pulsing blood red, the Aliens swarmed upward.

"You are the last."

I turned.

Hanging before me was an Alien. No different from any of the others, it gently bobbed and floated on invisible air currents. Its rust-red eye, fully extended on its gossamer stalk, strained towards me.

"You are the last," it said again in the same cold and mechanical voice that had first told me to enter the pillar.

I reached into my pocket, and pulled out Nicky's second lumbar vertebra. I offered the Alien my open hand. Nicky's last bone rested on my flat palm.

"Take the bones from both of us, then send me to Hell," I said. I wanted it over.

The Alien floated near, reached out its crystalline fingers for the piece of Nicky's backbone, but then pulled its hand away.

"We know nothing of Hell," it said.

The world turned crimson as Aliens swarmed around and over the tip of the pillar.

"You made a deal with God. In exchange for my bones, you'll send me to Hell." It couldn't possibly

deny that.

"We know nothing of God," it said.

My knees gave way, and I fell to the hard and knobby bone platform. "Send me to Hell!" I had to go. In Hell there'd be others. Nicky was leaving me, and God wouldn't let me die. If the Aliens didn't send me to Hell, I'd be left here alone. Alone forever.

"There's much work for you to do."

I was hearing the words, but there seemed to be no meaning associated with them. "Work?"

The Alien waved its stubby fingers, and a delicate crystalline tube grew from out of the platform's surface.

"Look," it said.

I stood, my knees still shaky, but managed to walk. The crystalline tube looked like a telescope, and was aimed down toward the Earth, pointing somewhere eastward. I peered into the eyepiece.

There were fields of green and gold, white-watered rivers, and, almost hidden beneath autumn-colored trees, a small town. And as I watched, the magnification of the telescope increased. Smoke drifted up from chimneys. Cows grazed, and a flock of frightened sheep, kicking up a cloud of dust, darted across a dirt road.

People filled the town square.

People.

Magnification again increased. They wore bib overalls, turbans, flowing white robes, and some even rainbow-colored loincloths. A pack of children, their skin color covering the spectrum from the palest of whites to the most ebony black, chased a mongrel-looking dog around a haystack.

"Survivors," I whispered. I turned back to face the Alien.

"*You won't be alone,*" said Nicky, his voice sounding distant, but coming from the palm of my hand. "*God had never intended that you should be alone.*"

"You are the last," said the Alien.

"How did they get there?" I asked. I'd wandered the world for almost two years, certain that I was the only one left, the only one that had survived, with only Nicky for company.

"Days after the human population was nearly destroyed, when we were certain that the few survivors would not continue to live unless they were gathered together, we made ourselves known, and brought the survivors to that village."

"Why didn't you bring me?" I asked, feeling the weight of the last two years pressing me into the bone beneath my feet.

It hovered silently for several seconds, its stalk eye staring up, seeming to look past the trillions of crystalline bodies. "Because you know," it said, now looking back down at me. "You know what it is to keep a promise to the dead." It reached out toward me with a closed fist. "Just as we know how to keep a promise." It opened its hand, exposing a shard of rose-colored glass. "Before your distant ancestors dropped down from the trees and walked across savannas, we had almost destroyed ourselves. Our world was different from yours, a place of ammonia seas and ice glaciers. But, just like you, we had devised an almost infinite number of ways to annihilate ourselves. We

eventually used one of them. The few survivors would have perished, but they were gathered up by an ancient race that had been watching over us, knowing that someday we might stumble and fall. They gathered the crystalline husks of our dead, and assembled them into a pillar that reached toward the stars. Living in the shadow of *our* bones, we never forgot the debt we owed that ancient race, or how someday, when we were able, we would pay them back."

"How?" I asked needlessly, certain that I already knew the answer. I looked at that red-tinted glass in its hand.

"Just before they left, they gave us a single bone. It came from their *own* pillar, assembled for them, by an even more ancient race that had once saved them just as they had saved us. They told us that *their* debt would be paid only when the last bone of *their* pillar was gone. We understood, and knew what was required of us to pay our own debt." It held the rose-colored shard toward me. "This is a husk splinter from our *own* pillar." Reaching forward, it dropped the shard into the palm of my hand, where it rested next to Nicky's vertebra. "Your debt will be repaid when *this* pillar no longer exists."

I looked down at my feet. I stood on the remains of five billion people, which contained a trillion bones.

"You know what it is to pay debts, to keep a promise to the dead. That is why you are the one we've told this to."

"Can I ask you a favor?" I said.

"Yes," it answered.

Placing the crystal husk in my pocket, I then held Nicky's vertebra out toward the Alien.

"Nicky?" I said quietly.

He didn't answer.

"Nicky, you'll see places that not even you dreamed of seeing. Will you go with them?"

"*Thank you for keeping your promise,*" whispered Nicky in a voice so faint that I could barely hear it.

"Would you please take this with you?" I asked, offering Nicky's second lumbar vertebra to the Alien. It hovered near, and reaching down, plucked the bone from my hand. It then floated upward, passing through the crystalline shield, and merged into the red whirlwind that spun around the tip of the pillar.

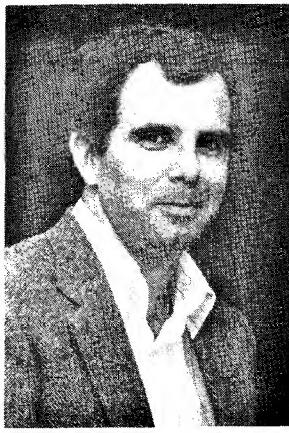
"Good-bye, Nicky."

There was no answer. Only the hard pinpricks of starlight shone down on me. I walked back to the pedestal, knowing that it would take me back to the base of the pillar, and knowing that from there I would find that town that lay somewhere to the east. As I took those few steps, two years of insanity, God and Hell, and even talking bones, seemed to evaporate like mist before the rising sun.

Our pillar was built from a trillion bones. The universe would be long dead and cold before we could save a trillion races. But of course the Aliens knew that. The debt could never be fully repaid. Just like them, we would forever live in the shadow of bones.

"Good-bye, Rick."

I looked up into that dark sky once more, having thought that I had heard Nicky's voice. But there was nothing there, nothing except the distant stars. □



EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Go Ahead, Play Editor

Unlike most human beings, we at *Aboriginal* do not go from hour to hour and day to day supremely confident that our choices and decisions are infallible.

A dollop of intellectual honesty, mixed with a second or two of attention and a brief discussion with any nearby human beings (or our publisher in the absence of one), will clearly demonstrate that there is usually more than one way of looking at something, more than one possible model of the universe.

To be more specific, every day we sift through the dozens of manuscripts we receive to find stories we feel are suitable for publication in *Aboriginal*. Last year, in a further refinement of that process, we selected some of what we believed were the best stories we had already published and republished them in our first anthology.

This year we are going to let you do the picking. And since your vehicle of communication with us is our Boomerangs, or letters, column, we going to call it our annual Boomerang Award. We want you to tell us what you think is the best short story we published in 1988. We also want to know what you think was the best piece of art and which was the best poem.

A real boomerang

And we aren't stopping there. The top choice you select in each category will be the recipient of a very important survival tool — a real boomerang.

We thought of giving a monetary award, but we don't have any money. Besides, if everything ever does fall apart, money will be useless anyway. And we certainly didn't want to give some piece of brass or bronze that would only be good for collecting dust on a shelf.

Most writers and artists don't make much money either. But a boomerang is better than money

because it isn't affected by inflation or a recession. The winners can use their boomerangs for defense or for shopping in the wild. And for those who might be vegetarians, it can bring down an out-of-reach apple or ear of corn just as easily as a rabbit (sorry, all you fans of Roger and Bugs). An instruction book comes with it.

And, if worse ever does come to worst, a boomerang is a very handy survival tool. It doesn't require high-tech ammunition and usually returns to the sender — assuming you read and follow the instructions. Lessons are not included.

Postcards only

To tell us your pick for the best story, poem or illustration we published in 1988, simply write down your choice in each category on the back of a POSTCARD and mail it to us. If you don't use a postcard, the vote won't count. We haven't the time to open thousands of envelopes. Selections for best story, best poem or best art may only be made from the Jan./Feb., March/April, May/June, Sept./Oct. and Nov./Dec. 1988 issues. (There was no July/Aug. issue.) You don't have to agree with our choice of cover art either. Inside art is just as eligible as cover art.

To repeat: There are only three categories — Best Story, Best Poem, Best Art. You may only pick one in each category. Each person may only vote once. The vote must be sent on a POSTCARD only to: Aboriginal SF, Boomerang Award, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

The postmark deadline for voting is March 1, 1989.

Go ahead, play editor.

Going back to the opening paragraph, a cursory review of the material in our slushpile also tells us that what we consider to be SF, or science fiction, doesn't necessarily match the concepts of some of those who are mailing stories to us. (If you do send us one, be sure to include a

self-addressed stamped envelope or you won't get it back.)

We aren't about to try and define SF generically, as there are far too many valid definitions already. Some hold that SF is only *hard* science fiction — e.g., strict extrapolation of scientific theory into a future setting and situation which gives rise to the plot and characters' actions. That's the kind of science fiction often typified by writers such as Hal Clement and Gregory Benford, to cite a range of styles.

Another class of science fiction doesn't deal directly with these scientific extrapolations as much as it addresses the social consequences of those "What ifs?" Here, in the realm of softer SF, you'll find a much larger segment of SF writers. And this realm has been the home of such people as Damon Knight, Theodore Sturgeon, Orson Scott Card, Ursula Le Guin, Connie Willis, Pat Murphy, et al.

Space opera?

Then there is space opera, which is often confused with "hard" SF, even though it really has more in common with adventure fiction, except it's set in the future. The *Star Wars* movie trilogy, for instance, was pure space opera with no scientific or social extrapolation except what was borrowed from existing conventions. Change the spaceships to horses or dragons, the planets to kingdoms and the lightsabers to Excaliburs and set it in a mythical past instead of a mythical future, and you have a fantasy adventure instead of SF. (In fact, you can then call it *Willow*.) Space opera, then, is more concerned with the trappings of SF than with any hard and fast rules, but it is still considered a category of SF.

Finally, there is what is called speculative fiction, which includes anything not in the previous

(Continued to page 63)

A Message from Our Alien Publisher

Derek Sean Patent-Pending Wilkerson

My study of human invention and patents led me to a patent lawyer and his family. When his toddler was a week old, this lawyer filed an application for patent protection on the boy. The Wilkersons are now waiting to hear the results of the Patent Office's official search for prior art. The infant, Derek Sean Patent-Pending Wilkerson, seems an ordinary child by any standard excepting that of his parents. Like most human infants, his time is fairly evenly divided among gurgling and crying. The Wilkersons, however, seem enormously impressed with this activity.

They live in a somewhat fashionable bedroom town to the north and west of Boston, where they both work. He is part of a medium-sized firm, and she's vice president for product development at a software company. I caught up to them at home. Determined not to be impressed by anything, the Wilkersons acted as if they regularly grant interviews to researchers from other planets.

"I like the frog suit," said Mr. Wilkerson. "It's very original. Have you thought about getting a patent for it?"

"Mr. Wilkerson," I said, "what made you decide to apply for a patent on your child?"

"We knew from the first that Derek Sean was going to be a remarkable achievement," he said, glancing at Mrs. Wilkerson. "We weren't about to give away his competitive advantage. Besides, look at his little toes. See how each one has a little toe nail at the end? How can you put a value on

that? He's utterly unique!"

"Aren't all infants unique?" I said. "Yet few parents ever apply for patents on their offspring."

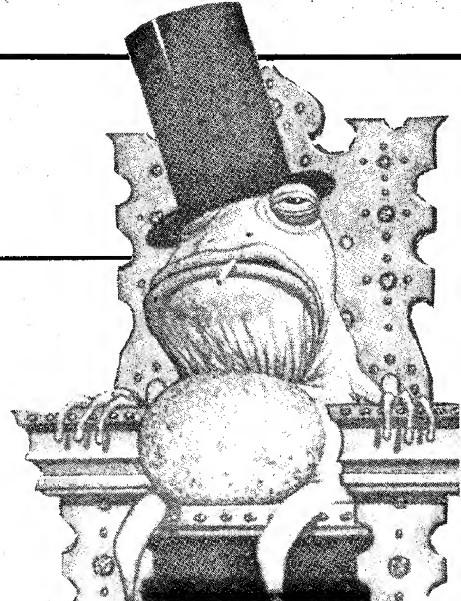
The infant's mother responded. "Of course, patent protection only lasts for 17 years, anyway. We haven't actually applied for a patent on *him*. We applied for a patent on his childhood, which should expire at about the same time as the patent. We expect his childhood to be perfect, and we intend to prevent others from wrongfully infringing on it."

"Have you filed applications abroad to protect his childhood from infringement in other countries?" I said.

"Under the multilateral Patent Cooperation Treaty," said Mr. Wilkerson, "Derek Sean is granted protection in several countries of Western Europe. And we filed separately in two countries of the Far East. I suppose we could have filed in the developing countries of Africa and the Middle East, but we felt that cultural differences being what they are, there was not enough chance of his childhood being copied in those places to warrant the expense of all that filing."

"Couldn't you say the same for the Far East, about the cultural differences, at least?" I said.

"Yes, you could," agreed Mr. Wilkerson. "But we felt that the Japanese and the Koreans might well be able to overcome the cultural differences and make knockoffs of his childhood if they thought there was a market in it. Given the possible profits, we thought they were entirely capable of copying the look and



feel of Derek Sean's original experiences. Besides, we had a hunch there might be good licensing prospects over there."

"You're going to license his childhood in Japan and Korea?"

"Most of the point of owning a patent is in licensing others to use it," put in Mrs. Wilkerson. "That's where the real gains are. You see, we purposely designed Derek Sean's childhood on an open-architecture model, so it would be reproducible. We aren't trying to keep his childhood a secret or anything. What use would it be if we didn't license it?"

"When did you first decide to apply for this patent?" I said.

"We thought as long as the U.S. Patent Office is granting protection to animals and to metaphors, why not childhoods?" she said.

"Animals and metaphors?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilkerson. "Edward noticed it first, of course."

"You are probably aware," said Mr. Wilkerson, "that Harvard University was granted a patent for a laboratory mouse in late 1987."

"Yes," I said. "Very little happens on this planet that I'm not aware of, but I hadn't run across anything about patenting metaphors."

"When software employs unique language and symbolism in its program presentation, or user interface, this symbolism is called a metaphor," he said. "Some software companies have

begun to seek protection for their metaphors. The first of these patents was granted in the spring of 1988, for a program that bases information storage on a metaphor known as 'card and rack.' "

"Are you worried that Derek Sean's patent might cause excessive pressure for him to have a successful childhood?" I said.

"He will have a successful childhood," said his mother. "We simply want to secure him protection for it. We worry less about pressure than we do about security. We've worked hard to produce

Derek Sean, and we aren't interested in someone else taking advantage of our efforts. That wouldn't be fair to him, would it?"

"What benefits do you think Derek Sean will realize from this patent?"

"We have contracts in place for a number of licenses," explained Mr. Wilkerson. "We are forming syndicates in Chicago, on the coast, and in Canada. These contracts will begin generating fees as soon as the patent is issued. We'll use these fees to

implement our plan for his childhood: bassoon lessons, his eighth birthday party, puppy love at the age of thirteen, and so on. We've funded him from current revenues so far, but he'll require additional capital before long. We calculate break-even just before his twelfth birthday."

"His twelfth birthday?" I said. "Isn't that a long time until payoff?"

"We're committed to Derek Sean," said Mrs. Wilkerson. "We're not just here for the short term." □

Science

(Continued from page 31)

know or see or recall has been colored by my biased senses and by the prejudices of my mind. The agenda of my conscious or unconscious desires can make me believe I see what I want to see. (In other words, I can fool myself.)

"Because of this, I must be skeptical of my own observations, especially when I want something to be true. I must therefore make controlled experiments and seek verification from neutral outsiders. I must beware the convincing power of the ego."

I propose now that the two paragraphs above represent the sum total of our Western addition to human wisdom ... and their lesson is still a *long way* from being wholly absorbed, even in the culture of its origin.

After all, we human beings are powerfully egotistical creatures. And although most of us today would praise those two paragraphs as stating an admirable ideal, it is clearly an ideal we fall short of regularly.

And yet, just *having* this ideal has changed us ... made us virtually a transformed people. Out of this discovery of self-doubt arose many fine things — democracy, egalitarianism, tol-

erance, true environmentalism, and science.

And there is little doubt in my mind that the ideal is completely and fundamentally contrary to the underpinnings of magic! However, I will leave that statement as a springboard into Part Two of this essay ... something to provoke a little discussion out there, in the meantime.

F or now though, let me leave with this remark. I see no need for endless warfare between

these worldviews ... that of magic and that of science ... that of romance vs. that of enlightenment ... that of past against that of future. For I do believe they are two sides of the whole that is ourselves. Tom Robbins was right. It's not enough to be practical and make a better world, so that we all get what we need.

It's also darn good at times to be able to dream, unrestricted by cold reason, of extravagant ways we might get what we want.

It is about unifying these contrary and opposing world views I'll speak in the next issue. □



Aborigines

(Continued from page 39)

The artist for "The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After" is **Byron Taylor**, whose last illustrations in *Aboriginal* was for "Little Black Book" in the Jan.-Feb. 1988 issue.

Taylor is illustrating the book *Nightshade*, by **Jack Butler**, for Atlantic Monthly Press, after doing the cover for another Butler book.

Byron is also getting into desktop publishing. He recently designed and printed a 150-page manual for the Brown University Department of Psychiatry using his trusty Macintosh and even made a few suggestions to our publisher.

He says his computer is more distracting than television. He leaves it on and whenever he has nothing to do he goes over to it and fiddles.

Taylor is planning to move his family of four to either Syracuse or



B. W. Clough

Philadelphia by next summer so that he can go back to school for sculpture.

He sent us a picture of him holding the biggest fish he ever caught, a five-and-a-half-pound large-mouthed bass that he nabbed not far from home in Rhode Island.

Author **B.W. Clough** may be on to a new SF sub-genre with "The Indecorous Rescue of Clarinda Merwin." Mayhap Regency SF?

Seriously now, Clough says "Clarinda Merwin" was "a product of intensive binging on **Georgette Heyer** novels."

Clough's first novel, *The Crystal Crown*, was published by DAW Books in 1984 and her most recent, *The Name of the Sun*, came out in June 1988, also from DAW.

Her short story "Ain't Nothin' But



Wendy Snow-Lang

"A Hound Dog" appeared in the June 1988 *Twilight Zone Magazine*.

Clough says she is working on a mystery novel "for a change." The Virginia resident says she got her start as a "meek, mild-mannered reporter for a major metropolitan newspaper," but is currently "supported by a compliant husband."

"Clarinda Merwin" is illustrated by **Wendy Snow-Lang**, whose last illustration in *Aboriginal* was for "Goodness" in the Nov.-Dec. 1988 issue.

Wendy has been writing horror stories lately, and taking a writing class at the local community college.

One of her vampire stories, "Want," will be appearing in a brand-new magazine in graphic novel form.

The magazine, *Taboo*, was created by **Steve Bissette**, formerly of D.C. Comics.



John Kessel

Wendy tells me one of her birds, a toucan named Feep, died recently, and some of the best bird vets in the country are still trying to determine why. Foul play is not suspected.

The poem "Mr. Hyde Visits the Home of Dr. Jekyll" was written by **John Kessel**.

Kessel's first published short story, "The Silver Man," appeared in

the magazine *Galileo* in 1978, during **Charlie Ryan's** earlier editorial incarnation.

Kessel teaches American literature and fiction writing at North Carolina State University. His latest novel, *Good News from Outer Space*, is due out from TOR next summer. Kessel and **James Patrick Kelly** are the authors of *Freedom Beach*, a Bluejay/TOR book published in 1985.

"Imprinting" is a poem by **Terry McGarry**.

McGarry works in the editorial department of *The New Yorker*, and is a freelance editor for Zebra/Pinnacle Books.

Her first published poem, "The



Terry McGarry

"One That Got Away," appeared in *Asimov's* in November 1988, and her poem "Death Perception" is in the January 1989 *2 AM*.

She has the story "If They Only Knew" coming out in *Owlflight* and "A.M." coming out in *Beyond*.

McGarry just inherited a word processor and is thinking about writing a novel. At age 26 her experiences already include bartending on Wall Street and being a street vendor in Ireland.

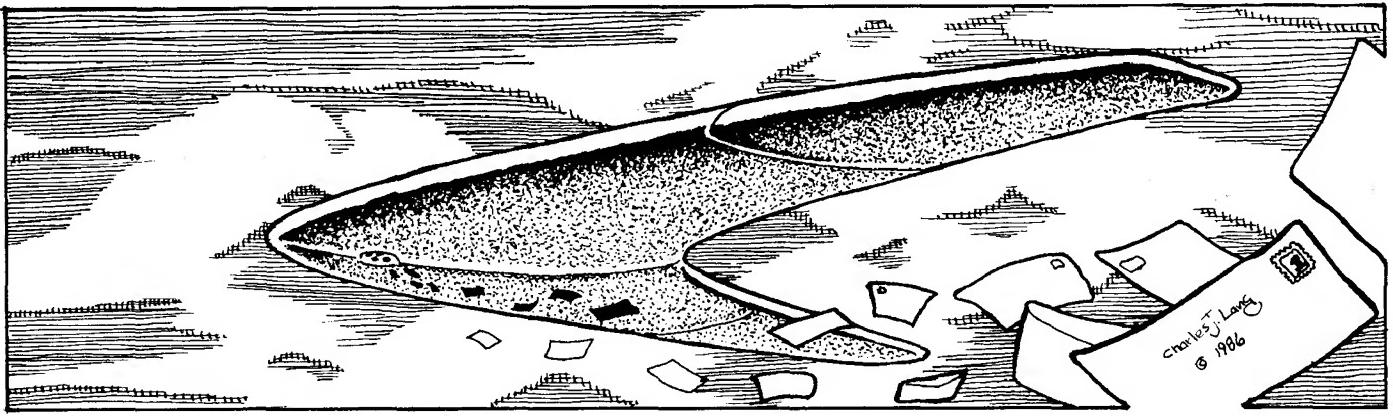
Clarions

The 22nd **Clarion** Workshop, one of the oldest and most respected, will be from June 25 to August 5. The sixth annual **Clarion West** workshop will be June 18 to July 29 in Seattle.

The workshops are for aspiring writers of science fiction and fantasy who are looking to sharpen their skills.

For applications or more information for **Clarion**, write to: Professor Albert Drake, Director, Clarion 1989, Holmes Hall East, Lyman Briggs School, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1107. The deadline is April 3.

For more information about **Clarion West**, write to: Clarion West, 340 15th Ave. E., Suite 350, Seattle, WA 98112. The deadline is March 1. □



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

Dear Madam, Sir, or Crazy Alien:

Since it seems to be obligatory for everyone to read a magazine and then write asking for more sex/violence/lesbians/ray-guns etc., and since I feel a need to protect myself from them getting in their preferences first, I will write too, and file my report card:

I just love "Good Neighbor" (by Patricia Anthony) and "Cat Scratch" (by Emily Devenport) and like "Killing Gramps" (by Ann K. Schwader) okay, and haven't read the others yet.

Does taking out a magazine subscription make all these folks feel they are entitled to run the magazine now, instead of just enjoying it and letting others enjoy theirs too? Too weird.

Sincerely,
Susan L. Johnson
Arlington, Virginia

(Don't worry, just because someone asks, doesn't necessarily mean they will receive. We publish the best stories we get and don't really target any particular type. —Ed.)

To the Editor:

I seem to remember you saying that you "only publish Science Fiction." Meaning, no Swords and Sorcery, or Fantasy. The latter word, of course, covers a VERY WIDE subject, and I understand that. As well as the fact that I could read good Fantasy for the rest of my life (I'm sorry, it's my favorite) and am very prone towards that line of writing. You might have guessed by now that I am heading towards "The Darkness Beyond," by Jamil Nasir in your May/June issue.

I almost went nuts. I loved it. It didn't hit me until I finished it that there were no starships, spaceships, laser weapons, energy enhanced suits

of armor, slimy aliens devouring innocent humans, slimy aliens devouring non-innocent humans, slimy aliens devouring other slimy aliens, or...

I hope you get my drift. I could go on forever on that line.

Anyway, "The Darkness Beyond," I felt, was pure Fantasy. Could you consider putting aside room for a Fantasy story once every other month? It might get a renewal out of me as well as giving readers "something different" once in a while.

No, I'm not just saying that because I plan to get into some heavy-duty part-time writing after I get a few things taken care of. I'm serious. Call it a "Strictly Amateur Spotlight." It might not only put you into a new light (that didn't sound right, did it?), but you could come across some new talent that never got an even break that deserves to have one published to let the Readers decide whether they want to read more from him or her. Isn't that what matters anyway? The spotlight would not have to deal with Fantasy only, of course.

Think about it.
Sincerely,
Gary A. Alderman
Bealeton, Virginia

P.S. Hugo, huh? Good fortune be with you. (Is it me? Or does that sound like something Spock would have said?)

(Actually, we often publish first sales, so we don't need an amateur spotlight, since once you are paid you are no longer an amateur. —Ed.)

Dear *Aboriginal*,

I hope I can get this renewal in, in time. I have been so busy this summer that I got lax in reading *Aboriginal*. And when I did get caught up I found

my subscription about to expire.

Since cutting out the form in the magazine would mean cutting out part of a story I hope that this letter will suffice.

I have been a sci-fi fan for a long time and I really enjoy your short stories, because with small children my time is such that I can read one of the stories in one sitting. I also enjoy the art, book reviews, let's just say I enjoy your whole magazine.

Thank you again for the best.
Sincerely,
Lois Anderson
Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just devoured my first issue of *Aboriginal* and I have a couple of comments to make if you please

1. MORE, MORE MORE!!!
2. I disagree with your assessment of *Falling Free*. I thoroughly enjoyed it but I could wring Stanley Schmidt's (*Analog*) neck for making me wait 3 months to read it all. Thanks much for rating it though, as it does bring attention to good new authors (new to me, that is). (*That was the opinion of Janice Eisen, one of our reviewers, not mine, and any opinion is subject to reasoned debate.* —Ed.)

3. I'm so impressed by my first copy of *Aboriginal* that I've enclosed a check for all the rest that I've missed. I feel certain *Aboriginal* will bring serious collectors out by the drove.

I am drooling for my next issue and I wish you well and hope *Aboriginal* succeeds beyond your wildest dreams. (I don't know ... we have some pretty wild dreams. —Ed.)

Best wishes,
A new fan
Kevin Menshouse

Dear Charlie,

1) Congratulations on your Hugo Nomination!!! (Gee, and I didn't think my vote would matter...). It's exciting that you are now a "prozine" (does that mean that authors get paid more?) (*Not yet. — Ed.*), too — maybe next year we'll have to badger them to set up a category for prozines, hmm?

2) It was interesting to read your reasons behind picking the name *Aboriginal* for your (our?) magazine. After reading that "ABO" is a derogatory term in Australia, I went to my handy-dandy collegiate dictionary and looked up the precise meaning of the term. Quote: "Being the first of its kind ... often primitive in comparison to more advanced types..." I leaned back in wonder, my mouth a round 0 — your magazine is very aptly named. I am impressed. Not that I'm saying you're primitive, mind you, but you're not *The New Yorker*. (Then again, the first definition of primitive is: "Not derived, original, primary..." Golly, another perfect description. I am amazed!) Anyway, what this is all leading up to is that I feel your name is original, fresh, and perfectly descriptive of what you are trying to present, and I see no reason to change it. Also, speaking of tilting at windmills — perhaps someday your/our magazine will become so popular and world-renowned that "ABO" will become a term of affection and intelligence, replacing the old derogatory term. Until then, perhaps discretion is the better part of tact....

3) I am renewing my subscription for 18 more issues, plus I am including the extra two bucks for the new anthology. (Hopefully the next one will have one of my stories in it ... I guess I'm an optimist)

4) I am also attending NolaCon in New Orleans — I truly hope I'll get a chance to meet you and thank you for all your written comments and help. (But then, if I don't get to meet you, "Thanks for all your written comments and help!") I'll be looking for you.

Sincerely,
Ann Nielsen

Dear *Aboriginal SF*,

Enclosed find my check for \$32 to renew my subscription for another 18 issues and my copy of your new anthology. I don't know if you have a prepaid subscription limit or not, but this renewal takes me up to issue 54. My last address label was not in the format of your renewal column, but my previous issue's was.

While I am at it, I think I will put my two cents in about issue 8. After reading all the letters about the wear and tear that happened to everyone else, I can only assume that a miracle

occurred. My copy of issue 8 arrived in perfect condition. And to top that off, I was stationed in the military on the island of Okinawa when I received my copy! Maybe it was "beamed" to me after a spaceship intercepted it in order to read it? Or maybe I got the Crazy Alien Publisher's copy?

This is the first science fiction magazine I have ever subscribed to. The reason is, of course, that *Aboriginal* is the only science fiction magazine I have come across that I didn't feel I was wasting my time reading. As my time is very valuable to me, you may take it as a compliment of the highest order that I take time to read every issue of *Aboriginal* from cover to cover. Also it stirred me to take additional time to write this letter. I must say it was worth the wait for my first 7 issues to arrive all at once. My wait was about three months, about the same as another smart subscriber's.

If you decide to print this letter I beseech you to edit it, as I am far from being a writer of the professional class. I will close now until I renew for another 18 issues next month

Respectfully,
Craig L. Luis
Salem, Oregon

(Now, if we only had thousands of subscribers like Craig — Ed.)

Dear Charles C. Ryan:

I could not agree more with your views regarding the "in the world of" novels we have begun to see. Such practices I believe have their roots in carnival midways.

Secondly, you discuss the old "simple" ways of publishing as compared with the new "bottom line" trend-followers who seem somewhat taken with developing a "no-thought-necessary" approach to doing business. Possibly they are taking too many lessons from the TV industry, which is rather like teachers asking the students what to do. I have some experience with the record business, and have always been amazed at how narrow an outlook most radio programmers and record executives have. Wave riders the bunch of them, all on homogeneous surfboards. The primary lesson to be learned from this is "people don't change — only marketing does." (My own quote!) This is because you don't pay marketing research companies and hot new execs just to tell you you're doing everything fine already. I feel some of this money would be better spent on new books and advertising instead. (Or new recording artists, or new TV pilots, or whatever.) I.e., a good book is a good book is a good ... thank you.

Your listed disenchantments are echoed everywhere lately. We find

Gregory Benford lamenting that he doesn't "find SF generally as filled with pure, fascinating ideas as it once was." And, about the other end, we hear Fred Pohl say that no one should be allowed to own more than two bookstores. Too much depends on too few too often. (That's mine too!)

I commend your editorial and your own efforts to make things better. And, it should be noted, the small presses are blooming in a big way. Filling in the gaps, perhaps. It's never over till it's over. (Someone else's!)

Most sincerely yours,
Mark Andrew Garland
Syracuse, New York

Dear Sirs and Madams,

I still haven't figured out who subscribed for me to begin with. I received a strange packet in the mail containing 6 strange "newspapers". Oh well, it was interesting. Then it became more interesting. It's been fun watching you grow and I really enjoy the format, stories, reviews, art, and of course, the Alien Publisher. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Mary White
(a 50-year-old grandma)
Nevada

Dear *Aboriginal*:

I subscribed to your magazine a few months back. I've been meaning to write for some time now but I've been too busy reading all the back issues. Subscribing to your magazine was one of the best decisions I've made for quite awhile. Every issue has provided nothing but pleasure. The artwork is always stunning, the articles and editorials are entertaining and the stories are first class science fiction.

It is amazing, every issue has been an improvement. As much as I liked your earlier large format. I think the new format is even better. Thanks for a wonder-filled few months and keep up the good work.

Thank you,
Mark J. Kuzma
California, Maryland

Dear Mr. Ryan:

The stories that have particularly stuck in my mind are James Brunet's "Symphony in Ursa Major" and Elaine Radford's "To Be an Auk" — in each case, the quality of the writing kept me reading when I opened the magazine, and the quality of the content kept me thinking after I had gone on to other things. Ellison's "Wave" in the last issue was entertaining and informative — especially for those who, like me, were in nursery and grammar school in the sixties. I agree with the general positive consensus regarding the new glossy format, and

I respect your recent decision to stop using "ABO" to indicate the end of a piece, in favor of a plain square, after you discovered that it was a pejorative racial term in Australia; perhaps you could solicit contributions or suggestions for a more imaginative symbol?

As for your well-deserved Hugo nomination, I voted for you, but to no avail. Maybe Noreascon's location will bring better luck!

Thanks — and continuing success with *Aboriginal*!

Sincerely yours,
Terry McGarry
Woodside, New York

Dear *Aboriginal*,

Love the title, the first oddly strange yet romantic title of the SF genre. It is like dreamtime, it allows the mind to swirl in the vast cosmos exploring outer, inner, and all possible spaces. I guess all SF magazines are supposed to do it but I think you've achieved this goal right off the bat. The stories you've chosen have never been dull and the art you've printed beside them, though bright and beautiful, has never been dull, also. The large format of your magazine allows the artists greater creative freedom to showcase their talents as well as to embellish the writers' words. Add color and you've got an unbeatable product.

Your subtitle, "Tales of the Human Kind" makes for interesting and mind provoking stories. While I love spaceship and hard science stories, they alone can't fulfill my reading needs. I take it your subtitle will entice writers to write more emotional and "consequential" stories, not necessarily of "What if" but incorporating as a major theme, "What happens now?" I see that "Human" doesn't only mean Homo sapiens but all sentient beings, like in "Shade and the Elephant Man" and "Solo for Concert Grand."

As mentioned above, a big plus for your magazine is the art. Bob Eggleton is Hot, no doubt about it, but his depiction of the Miasla hand shouldn't have included a thumb. But, hey, what the heck. I had a big laugh when I saw Larry Blamire's profile of Reverend Pilsner for "Eve and the Beast." Pilsner looks like a conservative radio talk show host we have up here in smog valley, California.

Having missed the early issues I was overjoyed to get your anthology. I'd like to thank Kristine Kathryn Rusch for "Sing," a most affecting story of its type. Stories about auras and paranormal powers usually turn me off but Rusch's story held me with its emotional grip. I just wonder how many people have died?

It was nice to see Frederik Pohl's

"Search and Destroy" once again, this time with Val Lakey Lindahn's art vibrantly alive. Eggleton's art for "Merchant Dying" was even more spacey than the first go around. Slick paper is great!

Don't change your title! Emily Devenport is correct in your use of ABO. It shouldn't be wrong, but we all learn and find that it is, to "them" not "us." Then we look again and find that it is wrong for us. It is wrong for its connotations of racism to use ABO. Even if there was nothing wrong with using ABO, just bringing up the subject of that nickname has brought me to the conclusion that ABO, in any case, is too cute. It's like the Snuggle teddybear and Pillsbury Doughboy, too sweet and saccharin, it's something to be ripped apart. I've already got it set in my mind to call you by your rightful name leaving out the SF. If you need a nickname, let it be known you don't need it to be catchy, you're above the Tommy and Johnny stage. You are *Aboriginal*.

Enclosed is an SASE. Please send me manuscript guidelines. I'd like to try my hand at a Human story.

An Alien Friend,
E.T. Christensen
Sacramento, California

Dear Sirs:

After hearing so much about *Aboriginal*, I finally found a bookstore that sells it. Unfortunately the bookstore is about 70 miles away. When I read the May-June issue I decided the 70 miles was worth it, but lucky for me I can subscribe and save the gas. So please enter my subscription.

Along with my check I'm enclosing an SASE for your writer's guidelines. I'll look forward to hearing from you, and I'd like to say that it's wonderful to finally have something exciting and different on the market. The stories and artwork were great and the editorials, boring and stale in so many other magazines, were entertaining and interesting. It's been a long time since I've read an SF magazine from cover to cover. Thanks!

Laura Mosman
Lebanon, Oregon

(Even though driving 70 miles for an *Aboriginal* is better than walking a mile for a Camel, subscribing makes more sense. — Ed.)

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I've been trying to catch up on my reading lately and I am happy to report that I have made it to issue No. 9 of *Aboriginal* and will probably catch up with you. However, I'm still reading my friend's magazines (he's too busy pretending to study his physics or working on his insect collection

to read all his SF magazines so someone has to) so I guess you're going to be sore at me for not subscribing.

It's a good thing my friend hasn't had time to read all the back issues of *Aboriginal*, though. If he had, he would have gotten some very bad ideas from Robert Metzger's stories. You need to tell Robert not to write any more stories with the Graduate-Advisors-from-Hell — he may just prompt my friend to do something rash. (I've hidden all the tire irons, but ...)

By the way, congratulations on your new (well, I told you I was a bit behind in my reading) state of slickness. When I discovered my letter in issue No. 8, I felt, well, like I was helping to make some history (sort of like the water boy did for the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team, but you know what I mean).

Until next time,
Mary Doolittle
State University, Arizona

Dear *Aboriginal SF*,

I have just read *Aboriginal* No. 11, and I feel I must apologize for certain remarks I made in a previous letter dated July 30, 1988.

Apparently your Alien Publisher has read my mind, because his column in issue No. 11 was lively and interesting. Just when you think he's losing his touch ...

Also, I must apologize for not mentioning earlier that your name is in dire need of a change (or an overhaul at least). Congratulations on your Hugo nomination (you deserved it), but your name simply does not say "Professionalism" to me no matter how you justify it. It does, in fact, bring to mind images of unprofessional, primitive work, and implies that the stories are exclusively about earthborns. (Have you looked up the definition "Aboriginal" in the dictionary? It's not a flattering title.) This is especially bad because it does not reflect the true content of your magazine, which is both professional and diversely unbiased toward earthborns.

Either your stories are improving or I am getting more used to your format, because it seems every issue is more impressive than the last. "Good Neighbor" by Patricia Anthony was a very impressive piece of work, and Emily Devenport's "Cat Scratch" was excellent (although the ending was a bit predictable once you got into the heart of the story).

Once again, however, "Boomerangs" was the most interesting section of the magazine. You have very enthusiastic readers, which is understandable since half of them are apparently striving to publish stories in your magazine (that includes me!).

What else? Oh yeah! I like your mix of columns and reviews in amongst the stories. It helps break things up so you have time to digest one story before rushing to the next.

And also — just think, if you print this letter, it may be the second time I've been published in a letters-to-the-editor column, and at the same time the second time I've been published in your magazine!!

(Okay, okay, I know technically Boomerangs isn't a letters-to-the-editor column, it's just comments from your readers, but you know what I meant.)

Oh, and I like the artwork for your Boomerangs column — don't change it!

Your fan,
David Littell
Grants Pass, Oregon

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Congratulations! It's been a long time since I've read a publication so refreshing, and this is the first time I've been excited enough to write to a magazine. You've done a superb job with the appearance of the product and the balance of its contents. I've enclosed payment for a year's

subscription and for a copy of your first issue. I've also enclosed an SASE for your writer's guidelines.

And I want to cast my vote for keeping the name of "Aboriginal." The only reason your magazine caught my eye was because of the enticing name. It really makes you wonder (Australian SF?). But if you look into the etymology of the word, it means "from the original." Since I find this magazine so original, I can think of no better tag for it. I say thumbs up!

Bob Zasuly
Plano, Texas

Hello Charles,

You have succeeded in blowing at least one evening for me out of every two months. Hope it will soon be one out of one. As a subscriber to both *Analog* and *Omni*, your mag is a welcome addition for a different approach and end result.

A suggested alternative to monthly might be to stay bi-monthly and add more stories. Having received the Nov-Dec issue prior to receiving the back issues I ordered, I was quite relieved when my order included issues 4 and 5. Did I say one evening?

Mr. Ellison's article on the new wave in SF was more than interesting since I own a copy not only of his *Dangerous Visions*, but also of J.G. Ballard's anthology of his own stories. Albeit they are book club editions, I would not part with either of them at ten times the price.

Now that the mag is successful, when does the TV series start?

My best regards to you and Mr. Al Ian.

Ed Jackson
Beloit, Wisconsin

Dear ASF:

Thank you for sending my missing seven issues. Enclosed is an automatic renewal for another 18 issues at \$30.00 plus \$2.00 for anthology at \$32.00.

I started with Hugo Gernsback and think its fitting you are nominated for an award named after him. You re-awaken the sense of wonder, and participation, that I remember so well.

Thanks for a great job.
Geno Stubenrauch
Hilton, New York

Our Renewal Policy

Our regular renewal rate is the same as our regular subscription rate — if we have to renew you. If you renew yourself, however, you can save at least \$2 or more. We figure you are smarter than the subscribers to other magazines and will recognize a good deal when you see it. There is a catch, of course — you have to self-renew before we send you a renewal notice. The sample label in the space below shows where to look for the expiration number of your subscription (we've circled it here) as it should appear on your mailing label. If you look at your label, the number of your last issue is the number of the *farthest to left* on the top line.

Last issue number

14

000099999

Mr./Mrs. Aboriginal Subscriber
0000 Any Street
Anytown, Any State 00000

This is issue No. 14. The deadline for those whose subscriptions end with issue number 17 (our July/Aug. 1989 issue) is Jan. 31, 1989 (determined by the U.S. Postal Service postmark on the letter). The deadline for subscriptions ending with issue #18 is March 31 and so on. Of course, the simplest way of taking advantage of this unique offer is to fill out the renewal form below right now and to send it to us with your payment. Payment must accompany renewal orders to get the discounted rate.

Naturally, we realize some of our readers who are not

yet subscribers may think this is a neat way of getting a subscription at a discount. But you won't fool our computer. If you aren't in our computer, then we'll only credit your subscription with the number of copies your payment would cover at the regular subscription rate. We do that for two reasons. The first is that the self-renewal rate is only offered to our loyal (and smart) subscribers. The second is that our circulation department will get miffed if they have to search for a non-existent name in the computer.

The special self-renewal subscription rate is \$12 for 6 issues, \$22 for 12 issues, or \$30 for 18 issues. But if we have to notify you by mail that your subscription is about to expire, the renewal rate will be \$14 for 6 issues, \$24 for 12 issues or \$32 for 18 issues. Why pay the higher rate? Renew now!

Or, if you like, pay the higher rate of \$24 for 12 issues or \$32 for 18 issues and we'll send you a copy of our special anthology. (See the ad elsewhere in this issue for a description of the anthology.)

Please renew my subscription to *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. I want 6 issues for \$12. 12 issues for \$22. 18 issues for \$30. My check or money order is enclosed. (I've added \$2 to my 12-issue renewal 18-issue renewal, please include the special anthology.) Please bill my:

Visa or Mastercard

Exp. Date _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Order from: ABORIGINAL SF, Dept. R,
P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888

Dear Charlie,

A few comments Re: *Aboriginal*. The old newspaper format turned me off, though I liked the stiff paper. I could live with a non-slick mag format, as long as the paper quality was good. The latest issues are slick, but the paper is thin. I don't think they would weather delivery well were it not for the plastic envelope. *Esquire* comes close to hardback status now, with its thick, ultra-slick, shiny covers, the SF mags are much the same (*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* is going for thicker, shinier covers soon).

Except for Harlan's essay — the stories by Ben, Brian, Fred, Connie, Scott, George, your stable is mostly new. I have seen enough of Metzger and Anthony to last awhile, though they wrote good stories. And I guess that your \$250-on-publication policy means that you have to solicit big names (maybe pay them more?).

Some days I tire of knowing the names of authors' cats, whether authors went on a picnic, the current state of their health (their job histories), other times I like it. Many authors are guilty of candor disproportionate to the rapport, though many readers see this as willingness to share (and maybe it is).

Best wishes,
Felix Gottschalk

Dear Mr. Ryan (Charlie),

I picked up a copy of the September-October issue at the local Books Brothers store. Good to see local magazine rack distribution for ASF! The new slick cover looks super — in all honesty, far better than the copies of *The Twilight Zone* next to it on the shelf! The other thing that sold me was the excellent Bruce Boston poem, "Against the Ebon Rush of Night," therein! As a Boston completist, that's one thing I can never resist! Also I particularly enjoyed the Philip C. Jennings tale, "Doctor Quick."

Sincerely,
t. Winter-Damon ("Damon")
Tucson, Arizona

Dear *Aboriginal Science Fiction*:

I vote to keep the name *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. Let it confuse people — the more the better. My friends are still confused about it, and frankly I don't buy your story about using "alphabetical order." But my point is: why destroy an anomaly with the mundane?

Anyway, you could refer to it as "ASF".

Continued Success!
Kurt Donaldson

Dear Editors:

Okay, I'm hooked.
I can't give you credit for a major

event, though. I've been reading and loving SciFi for at least 15 years. Heinlein, Clarke, the old crowd, along with Ellison (yes, Harlan, I've seen the light!), Varley, Zelazny, Le Guin, Pohl, and the countless others.

Years from now, perhaps only a few, YOU will be the old masters while younger writers strive to match your achievements.

Is there higher praise? Perhaps. I am enclosing the monetary amount required for a subscription. Between the words and the dollar sign, the modern reader can submit no higher accolades.

Yet one other form of praise remains.

I would like a copy of your writer's guidelines.

In perhaps the most sincere form of honor, I strive to place my name among yours in the sands of time. That I might fail makes the praise no less. That I may succeed assures your continued renown.

That others may seek to emulate you, certainly no tribute is higher.

Mike Taylor
Lexington Park, Md.

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I discovered science fiction with *The Magic Ball from Mars* back when everybody liked Ike. Then I got hold of *Starman's Son* by Andre Norton, and that clinched it. However, in all my years of reading I never subscribed to a science fiction magazine until *Aboriginal* came along.

I can't imagine how I lived so long in a vacuum.

I was surprised but thrilled to receive all those back issues when we subscribed and really pigged out. Among my favorite stories were "Every Sparrow That Falls," by Rebecca Lee, "Merchant Dying," by Paul A. Gilster, "Tiger's Heart," by John S. Tumlin, "Sunshine Delight," by Paul Edwards, "To Be An Auk," by Elaine Radford, "What Brothers Are For," by Patricia Anthony — I could go on and on.

Now that I've gobbled up all the back issues, I have to rely on the new ones coming out. By strict rationing and stern self control, I managed to make the May-June issue last two whole days — "A Third Chance" by Robert A. Metzger and "Sweet Tooth at Io" by Patricia Anthony were great. Now I'm back to waiting for my next fix.

Do you have any idea how long two months is? Can't you please think about going monthly?

There's only one other thing that would make me enjoy *Aboriginal* more — I'll bet you know what that is, don't you? After 11 years of stuckness — during which I only wrote what was required for my newspaper job — I've started doing real stuff again. I at-

tribute my recovery to having attended a Bob Dylan concert — as an added boost, Allen Ginsberg was in the audience.

Anyway, I am enclosing a SASE for your writer's guidelines.

Thanks,
Nikki Patrick

Dear Ladies, Gentlemen, and Aliens of either, neither, or both sex,

I must admit I picked up my first copy of your magazine to determine the possibility of my fiction fitting into *Aboriginal*. In five minutes I was hooked. I am now a fan. With my introduction to the Alien Publisher I immediately called Scotty and informed him not to beam me up, there is intelligent life down here, even if it isn't necessarily native.

My only problem is that my funds are momentarily tied up in collector Seldon Empirical Credit Pieces impossible to cash on this planet. Hence, I am unable to purchase your magazine on a regular basis until gaining some Earth capital. The only way I know how to do that is through possibly selling some fiction. Hence, please send me your writer's guidelines.

Sincerely yours,
Dan Davis

(Native of Topia, a quark's throw from Gallifrey.)

Dear Editor:

I was quite glad to see an essay by the famous perverter of young minds — Harlan Ellison — in your November-December 1988 issue. As a youth, I was lucky (Make that — Lucky. No, make that LUCKY!) enough to have my mind wondrously warped by Ellison's work.

Prior to reading his stuff I had sifted through the innocuous writings of other, less outspoken authors. I had read the requisite pulps, and a few novels by Asimov and the rest. At that point, I was basically stabbing around in the sea called Science Fiction, hoping to spear an occasional edible fish. When I was thirteen, I caught a shark named Ellison, and the * * # * thing had such pretty teeth, I couldn't throw it back. (That particular shark was found in a book called *Paingod and Other Delusions*.) The shark quickly turned the situation about so that I was the one who was caught.

The rest of my formative years were spent poring over any Science Fiction/Fantasy — New Wave and otherwise — that I could get my hands, and eyes on.

Some people have a bad attitude toward Mr. Ellison. They see him as a singularly warped, cynical individual. Well, he is, but he is also much more! He is one of the funniest writers alive. If he intends to crack you up with a

story, he does it. And he is also a great teacher. He taught me (through his writings — go read his essays sometime) not to be a lemming. From him I learned to develop social, and personal conscience. My conscience is not exactly aligned with his, of course, because I learned my lessons well. (Besides which, he kills for such things.)

Enough of the vainglory directed at Ellison, now on to the other reason I have written.

Aboriginal is *ABO*solutely great! Like so many others, I was intrigued by the title, impressed by the cover art, and flabbergasted by the rest of the magazine. You folks do great work. And I don't impress easily.

I've read some of the other 'zines — pro, and otherwise — and have subscribed to a couple. The others lack your quality — and I don't care who knows it! So there!

What I like best *ABOut* your magazine is your fostering of talented, "novice" writers and artists, and your attitude toward yourselves. You folks seem to have the fun-filled spirit that the other magazines have lost. The other folks take themselves and the work too seriously — which makes them boring. But oh no, not *Aboriginal*, no boredom in those pages!

As for the bit *ABOut* novice writers, your writer's guidelines sheet is presently pinned to my wall. Maybe one of these days I'll see MY name in the pages of *Aboriginal*.

Keep on with the great work.

Sincerely,
Timothy P. Dudenhoefer
Arnold, Penn.

P.S. If it didn't get lost in the Postal Warp, there should be a check for a subscription. But don't blame me for anything else that slithers out of this letter. You see, one of my aliens is missing.

To the Editor:

There is often a message of hope in the literature of Science Fiction. Many times the message is directed at the whole of the human race. I, however, have found that nothing gives me greater hope in my personal life than reading very good Science Fiction — the kind found in your magazine.

Your dedication to art, and to taking chances on new authors is very admirable. I have read your magazine and I believe, have been inspired. So, naturally, there is enclosed a SASE for a copy of your writer's guidelines.

Thomas E. Zammikiel
Yonkers, New York

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I have never before been moved to write a letter in praise of anything.

But, in this age of diminishing quality, I feel compelled to offer my thanks and good wishes to *Aboriginal*, and hope for a long life in print.

I discovered your magazine while browsing through the science fiction section of one of those writer's market guides. Two things immediately struck me concerning the listing *Aboriginal* had in the guide: First, your name was at the top of the list (*Aboriginal* comes before *Amazing*. How clever!). Second, the name "*Aboriginal*" itself led me to think that this was going to be no ordinary, run-of-the-mill science fiction rag (How right I was!). The brief, one-line description stating a desire for fiction with "strong science content, lively, unique characters, and well-designed plots" was merely an added incentive to check this baby out.

I just finished reading the Nov-Dec 1988 issue and feel glad all over that there is still a place in this world where science fiction can thrive and, more importantly, evolve into the twenty-first century — I hope that the rest of your issues will be as good or better as the one I read. I don't want to say I told you so, but I always had a feeling about the recent proliferation of those Elvis impersonators. I'm glad Robert Metzger had the guts to tell the true, shocking story. Seriously now, Pat Anthony's "Anomaly" was a lesson to me in how to write a short story, and Harlan Ellison was both provocative and enlightening, as always.

As a science fiction reader since my childhood days (not that long ago. Really!), I had always cultivated the idea, for better or for worse, that I had a few stories tucked away deep inside the excuse I call for a brain just waiting to come out. Well, the procrastinator (read "lazy," "insecure," or whatever you wish) in me has been rearing its ugly head for much too long as far as I'm concerned. In response to the brave and formidable challenge your magazine presents to would-be science fiction writers like myself, I am requesting a copy of your writer's guidelines (SASE enclosed), God save us!

Thanks again for a good magazine, and for daring to encourage new, unknown talent. Yes Virginia, there is life after the Golden Age

Sincerely,
Michael A. Baca

Dear *Aboriginal Science Fiction Folks* (Aliens),

Judging from the last couple issues "Boomerangs," the subject of a potential name change has been voted down. (Correct. — Ed.) What remains is for *Aboriginal* to change the meaning of the name *ABO* (Down Under, especially, for it seems that we Americans do not have a corner on

bigotry).

Lasting power seems to be on your side. You are doing surprisingly well, considering how poorly some similar smaller mags do in their first year(s).

(My own — *CUBE Literary Magazine* — as a case in point. We have 70 actual subscribers. The remaining magazines in our required 200 copies for bulk-mail certification are sent out as complimentary copies, just so people know we exist. We sell some single copies, but hardly enough for the magazine to pay for its own press run.)

I don't foresee that changing the connotations of the word "aboriginal" should be a sticky problem for you. You have already managed it with me. I don't look at the cover and think, "small, native, dark-skinned people from Australia." No. I think "quality, conscientious, witty, imaginative magazine."

That some people are stuck on a name as being "a negative," we can only praise the gods that you didn't call the magazine *Adolph SF*.

Stick to your guns (or your laser-turrets, whatever).

Now, I must compliment you on your selections of fiction, poetry, and colorful artwork (although, often, this last is the weakest aspect of your magazine). The most consistently outstanding aspects of your mag are your editorial and publish(ial?) additions. Your book reviews are the best I've come across, hitting points that I consider important as well.

Your reviewers don't seem to be scared easily by big names. If a book is waste of time, Darrell and Janice tell you like it is, no matter who wrote it. I'm sure they have spent time reading plenty of books that have taken sizable chunks out of their lives that they would like returned (like most any series works, especially Anthony and Foster, who have both slipped horribly, if you ask me).

Have you considered doing some research on the greatest marketing scheme ever created for sf/f? I mean series books, of course. Who else does this sort of thing work for except those trashy romance novels? Perhaps you could interview some of the better authors (not the more wealthy) like Zelazny and O'Donnell and any more, if you can find some. Ask them if their publishers have them on contract to do this nasty stuff or if they would much rather put everything into just one big book? I have stopped reading most of the pastiche in the Waldenbooks, because it is, for the most part, quickly written, blueprint garbage.

Another task for your reviewers: there exists an anthology named *Synergy*, the most recent issue of which should be available soon from the publisher, which deserves a

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review. (See Janice's review. —Ed.)

I think that's enough.

Don't want to bug you.

Oops, sorry for the racial slur
(Aussies aren't the only ones, like I said).

Eric Mathews

Editor

CUBE Literary Magazine

Newport News, Va.

Dear Editor,

First of all I would like to say that I have enjoyed the 1988 Anthology and first three issues of my *Aboriginal* subscription, though I do not understand your renewal policy. But, since I have signed on for twelve issues, I figured I would have plenty of time to worry about this later.

Well, now thanks to Darrell Schweitzer, I need not concern myself with renewal worries and you can save yourself some money by not bothering to send out a subscription renewal reminder to me.

You see, in two of your last three issues my reading preferences and myself as a Fantasy enthusiast have been gravely insulted. In the Sept./Oct. issue D.S. stated that one has to have the mentality of a twelve-year-old (I am 34, by the way) to enjoy and

appreciate the punnish humor of Piers Anthony's *Xenth* books. I was willing to let this pass in deference to the rest of your magazine. However....

In the current Jan./Feb. issue Mr. Schweitzer sinks even lower, again calling my tastes "juvenile" and the books of my personal library, such as Terry Brooks' "Shannara" series, "unutterable atrocities" and "bland crap." D.S. sounds very much like some of the pompous know-it-alls I've come across on the SCI-FI/Fantasy forum of my BBS.

So continue sending the remainder of my subscription (a deal is a deal) and I will avoid Mr. Schweitzer's column like the plague. But since I refuse to continue to help pay such a person's salary, do not waste your postage on trying to get me to re-subscribe.

Regretfully,

Martha L. Hutchinson

Hawthorne, California

(*A few years ago I picked up a copy of Charlotte's Web for my children and re-read it myself. Yet, even though it falls squarely in the children's book category, I'm not about to throw it out. It has a safe place on my bookshelf, as do Robert*

A. Heinlein's juveniles, which I can still enjoy and which I also am not throwing out.

In his column, Darrell expresses his opinions of the books he reviews, just as you have expressed your opinion above. If Darrell were to say that I'm juvenile because I still think Charlotte's Web is good and worth reading at any age, that would be his opinion — mind, I'm not saying that is his opinion, for I don't know. I'd disagree. But that doesn't mean I'd fire him or lop his head off the next time I see him.

(You see, that's a great strength of this country, that you, or anyone, can express his or her opinion in the free marketplace of ideas where it sinks or swims on its own merits. If we were to censor opinions we didn't like, then anyone would have the right to censor our opinions. If we were to retaliate against everyone whose opinion we did not like, how long would the First Amendment, or this country, last? — Ed.)

Dear Charles Ryan and Jonathan Lethem:

Bravo! to both for "The Cave

(Continued to page 62)

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo (St. Martin's Press, 1979) features 12 stories by the following authors: Harlan Ellison, Brian Aldiss, Alan Dean Foster, Connie Willis, John Kessel, Kevin O'Donnell Jr., D.C. Poyer, M. Lucie Chin, Joe L. Hensley & Gene DeWeese, John A. Taylor, Gregor Hartmann, and Eugene Potter.

For a limited time, while copies last, you can purchase a first-edition hardcover copy of *Starry Messenger: The Best of Galileo* for \$10, plus \$1 postage and handling. If you would like your copy autographed by the editor, please indicate how you would like the note to read.

To order, send \$11 for each copy to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, Book Dept., P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.



The Indecorous Rescue of Clarinda Merwin

By B.W. Clough

Art by Wendy Snow-Lang

Lord Octavius Binyon let his quizzing glass fall again, to hang from its black silk riband, and seized her hand. "Your respected father has given me permission to pay my addresses, Miss Merwin," he purred.

In a panic, Clarinda Merwin tugged at her captive hand. It might as well have been clamped in an iron shackle. Between the covers of circulating-library novels this kind of situation conveyed an appeal that quite failed to translate to real life. Hastily she bethought herself of what Pamela, in Mr. Richardson's famous book, would have said. "My lord, you presume!"

Such lamentably conventional protests rolled right off my lord, who simply possessed himself of her other hand. As he leaned close Clarinda shrank away from the combined odors of brandy, horse sweat, cigar smoke, and amber which clung to Lord Binyon's person. "A June wedding, I think," he mused. "The nights are so warm in June."

"That's a very coarse thing to consider!" Clarinda flared. "And you merely assume I will accept you!"

"Of course you will accept me, my dear." Between his bristly black side whiskers Lord Binyon smiled. "Your parents ardently wish it."

"Mamma is a climber, and Papa a snob!" Clarinda wanted to retort, but before she could do so Lord Binyon applied his mouth to her own. His chin rasped against her own, and his arms cramped her ribs. When he released her she reeled back against the portieres.

"The engagement will be announced at the ball tonight," Lord Binyon said. "I must go down to consult with your father and his butler about the wines. But I will return soon, to lead you out in the dancing."

He smiled into her horrified eyes and then bowed himself out. Clarinda sank trembling into a chair and fumbled in her reticule for a handkerchief. She wiped her mouth again and again to get rid of the taste of him, in vain. At last she dared to spit, into the fire of

course. Mamma would have swooned, but she felt a little better.

Clarinda had no intention of marrying Lord Binyon, any more than she could jump over the moon. But to defy her parents' fond wishes and anxious plans seemed only slightly less difficult. Fortunately Clarinda was a widely read girl. She knew exactly what a female in her situation ought to do. With some difficulty, for the servants usually did the work, she opened the library window. Stripping off her long kid evening gloves she stuffed them and the reticule behind a sofa. After dusting the windowsill with a cushion she sat on it, and then, hitching up her straw-colored muslin gown, swung her legs out.

To climb out a second-story window in a ball gown is not beyond the realm of human endeavor when one is fortified by a diet of romantic fiction. But to do so on the night of a ball is perhaps imprudent. Clarinda was annoyed to see that the street hummed with traffic, both horse and foot. Mrs. Merwin had invited every tonnish person of her acquaintance to witness her daughter's triumph, not to notice her escape.

Clarinda counted of course on being noticed by one particular person. In the novels which formed her sole literary diet Clarinda knew that the heroine's rescuer was invariably tall and handsome, well-born and well-heeled. "If only he's fair," she said to herself, as she shinnied down the ivy-cloaked wall. "After that odious Binyon creature I don't think I could countenance a dark-haired man."

So she felt no surprise when she glanced down and saw the shrubbery being pushed aside. "My hero!" she sighed, leaping lightly to the ground and turning to face her rescuer.

He was indeed fair. Alas, all the other attributes of a fictional hero — money, appearance, leg, station, even humanity — were totally lacking. A short round creature looked up at her from a large yellow eye in the middle of its round head. Three lesser eyes were set at apparently random intervals in what passed for the face. Thin orange fur or hair covered its skin, and it wore natty trousers of silvery cloth.



BURNING MAN

Without further comment Clarinda fainted.

She came to herself rocking and swaying to a familiar motion. "A chaise," she murmured dazedly to herself. "I've been kidnapped!" Surreptitiously she smoothed her ribbons. No doubt the startling orange monster was pet or servant to her captor, who would be a dashing rake. Nothing would be beyond such a one, certainly not carrying away a helpless maiden. She looked forward to reforming him by her sweet innocence and gentle manner.

She peeped cautiously from beneath her long brown eyelashes. Beyond the window tall trees and empty heath slid past, silvery in the moonlight. Evidently the chaise had left London. Then she turned her gaze to the other seat.

"Oh!" The orange thing was here! Perching, or squatting, or whatever, right across from her! Having shed her pose of unconsciousness Clarinda sat up, seething. "What are you?" she cried. "What are you about?"

A pursed little mouth like that of a goldfish protruded from the rusty fur. With some halts and stammering the creature said, "Se habla espanol? Efharisto! Nee ho ma?"

Clarinda ground her pretty teeth. A foreign monster, not even a decent British one! Beside her in the chaise's side pocket she felt something hard. Quickly she reached in and took it out. It ought to be a gun, she told herself — an ivory-mounted hair-trigger dueling pistol.

Instead she held a white tube, preternaturally smooth and crimped across one end. If this was a weapon she didn't know how to use it. Enraged, Clarinda flung it at the creature, who caught it neatly in a hairy three-fingered paw. It held the open end of the tube to its spoutlike mouth and sipped vigorously.

"Ooh!" it lisped. "Much better!"

"You speak English!" Clarinda exclaimed. "Then you owe me an explanation, sir or madame! I am Miss Clarinda Merwin, and I am not accustomed to riding in a closed carriage unchaperoned!"

"I chaperon you," the creature said. "Madame is right, Madame Rii you shall call me. And you too are female?"

"Yes — you don't mean *you* ..." Clarinda sank back against the cushions. Females, even orange ones, ought to wear more than a skimpy pair of silver breeches! She considered fainting again, in justice to her sense of decency. But then it occurred to her that the vapours would tremendously retard the necessary exchange of information. Though her Mamma had inculcated habits of perhaps an exaggerated delicacy, Clarinda still possessed some remnant of common sense. So she demanded, "And what is your business with me?"

"Student," Mme. Rii said. "From, ooh, a planet of the star Vega. I research a report on Exosociology."

These last phrases meant nothing to Clarinda. "A bluestocking," she dismissed.

"My, ooh, colleagues in the biology division beg me to bring back a specimen," Mme. Rii whistled. "Finding you lying in the bushes, I hoped you were

discarded and deceased."

"I am not either discarded," Clarinda retorted, outraged. "I have only eighteen years, that's not on the shelf yet! Besides, I'm the one rejecting Lord Binyon!"

"Please to explain?"

Clarinda's favorite confidante, Miss Lizzie Haynes, had last week gone with her Mamma to take the waters at Bath. So Clarinda found it something of a relief to pour out her story — how, having made his fortune in stocking mills, Papa meant to lever the family into the highest social circles; how rumor of an immense marriage settlement attracted the indigent but well-born Lord Binyon's interest; how Mamma and Papa were set on her becoming Lady Binyon and sister-in-law to the Duke of Haverness. By the time she had gone into details about Lord Binyon's evil smile and clammy encroaching hands, Clarinda hardly remarked the oddity of her companion.

It helped that Mme. Rii sat opposite, in a posture which did not display her distressing lack of height. And by the time Clarinda recounted all the gossip she had heard, of Lord Binyon's dissipated habits and lurid life, she felt that Mme. Rii was a most sympathetic listener. She even took notes, in a little square black notebook. "Lest I, ooh, forget any detail," Mme. Rii said. Clarinda was flattered. Lizzie had never paid her half so much attention.

"So, what should I do?" she concluded. "What would you do, dear Mme. Rii, were you I?"

Mme. Rii closed two of her lesser eyes thoughtfully, and licked the pause button on her minirecorder. "In my country males supply no such difficulty," she fluted. "Why do you not kill him?"

"Is that really what you would do?" Clarinda asked, much impressed.

"Surely. Break his neck, and then mate with him. And then lay your eggs in a nice leaf. That's what, ooh, respectable females in my country do."

"I don't think that would quite serve the purpose," Clarinda said, freezing briefly again. Then she giggled. "I wish some of the ladies in the books would try it, though!"

"Books? Please, explain!" Mme. Rii said with eager interest, and released the pause button.

"Well, I just finished *The Maiden's Treasure*," Clarinda recalled. "It was so thrilling! About a beautiful but poor girl who makes a marriage of convenience with an old earl. At least, he wasn't old, but almost thirty. And she learns how to play whist and gambles away lots of his money. And then he fights a duel with her chief creditor..."

Time passed, whiled away very pleasantly by summaries of *The Rake's Reform*, *Mistress Anna's Revenge*, and *The Castle at Silver Rock*. At last Mme. Rii sighed. "My dearest wish, ooh, is to read some of these knowledgeable and erudite texts."

"Why, I'd be happy to let you have mine," Clarinda said. "One never rereads romances, you know."

"You do not study them, memorize?" Mme. Rii said, astonished. "Ooh! but I must hasten to accept your kind offer!"

"By all means," Clarinda said. "You have been so

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understanding. And Mamma is forever begging me to clear some of them out! She disparages my tastes in reading as rather low."

The carriage turned around, and since their journey had been through Hyde Park and not the outlying London suburbs the horses soon drew up at Merwin House again. The ball had begun some hours ago, and the street thronged with carriages. Mme. Rii's chaise fitted in very well among them. To avoid comment Clarinda led her friend through the shrubbery to the library window.

"Oh dear," she said, looking up at the second-story casement. "I don't think I can climb back up. As it is, my gown is soiled. Yellow shows the dirt so."

"Worry not," Mme. Rii lisped. She fiddled with her belt, which shone like a parure with bits of glass and crystal. Clarinda felt a peculiarly tense buzzzy sensation, as may oppress the air before a thunderstorm. Her skin crawled. She looked down and saw her feet parting company with the ground. Before she could marshal the resources to scream or faint Mme. Rii floated up beside her. They soared like birds right through the open window.

"Dear me!" Clarinda said, breathless. Glancing into the mirror over the fireplace she smoothed her tumbled brown curls. "The next time we do that I must wear a hat!"

"The books?" Mme. Rii whistled longingly.

Clarinda dragged them off the library shelves. "All those leather ones are dull, Aristotle and Petrarch and such. Papa bought them by the yard, just like ribbon, can you imagine? But all these lower ones, where one can't easily read the titles, are mine." She stacked the volumes up on the sideboard beside the door, while Mme. Rii eagerly turned the pages to gaze with uncomprehending awe at an engraved portrait of Mr. Horace Walpole.

"You are so kind, ooh!" she said. "I will do you a favor too, Miss Merwin, one day."

No sooner had she fluted this generous wish than the little orange alien was swept back by the door as it was flung open. "There you are!" Lord Binyon hissed. "Minx! Where have you been hiding? Come with me. Mr. Merwin will make the announcement in ten minutes."

"Oh, no!" Clarinda wailed, retreating.

Binyon seized her wrist and twisted it slightly: "Don't trouble to put on these missish airs," he said. "Your 'no' will change to 'yes' soon enough."

"No!" Clarinda shouted. "Mme. Rii, help!"

The door slammed shut as Mme. Rii bounced out from behind it. She leaped to Lord Binyon's head and hugged it. There was a muffled cracking noise as the alien pivoted around his shoulders, turning his head much further than nature had designed it to turn. With a sigh Lord Binyon collapsed to the carpet.

"Oh my goodness," Clarinda whispered. "Is he—?"

"Dead, of course," Mme Rii said. "But how odd! Decease does not increase his readiness for mating at all!"

"Englishmen don't do things like that," Clarinda explained, rather hopelessly. "What shall we do with his body? Push it out the window? Or — no, I know!

Dear Mme. Rii, did you not speak of a search for a specimen?"

Mme. Rii twined her six fingers together in ecstasy. "Do you say you will give me your mate also? Ooh, Miss Merwin, it is too much! I shall mention you in my thesis. You shall be immortalized in the scholarly tomes of Arretizil University!"

"No, no, the pleasure is mine," Clarinda said.

She helped Mme. Rii to stack the books on and around the late Lord Binyon. After a few adjustments to her belt Mme. Rii found no difficulty in levitating the awkward load out the window.

"I make my *adieu*, dear Miss Merwin," the stout little alien said. "My perpetual thanks!"

"Not at all," Clarinda said. Greatly daring, she bent and planted a kiss on the fuzzy orange head. All four yellow eyes blinked in surprise. Then Mme. Rii soared out the window and down to her carriage. Clarinda scooped up her fallen reticule and took out the handkerchief again. Slightly ashamed, but on the whole obedient to her fastidious upbringing, she wiped her lips. □

Mr. Hyde Visits the Home of Dr. Jekyll

By John Kessel

*H*e'd left the back door open
As if expecting a visitor
He could not admit by the front,
And as the night was cold,
And his coat too large,
I did not spurn his equivocal hospitality.
His servants slept:
Hearts asleep in their bodies, too
Smothered by conscience
And a dull master.
Gathering my big clothes about me
Like a boy in the attic playing man,
I hurried to his room
Where troubled sheets betrayed
How an hour ago he'd tossed,
Desiring me.
I pinched the money from his purse,
Took clothing of more proper fit,
And paused to brush my hair
Before his mirror.

*H*is face is scarred by virtue.
Mine is not.
He dreams of me
And prays for deliverance.
But that is only envy
Of my peculiar beauty,
Which he fears
And calls by other name.



Boomerangs

(Continued from page 55)

Beneath the Falls," in the Jan./Feb. 1989 *Aboriginal*. Thanks to Charles for taking a chance on this well crafted story, and to Jon for writing it. Great job! Since Jon has had "no formal training as a writer," he's clearly a natural. I'd love to read his novel about the balloon trip around Mars. Ray Bradbury might want to read it also!

If the novel is not publishable for whatever reasons, maybe Jon could send me a copy to read. I'm sure I could benefit from it, as I have from studying his extremely smooth transitions and precise detailing in "The Cave" Jon's writing is effortless to read, often brilliant in its metaphors and a fine addition to the high quality pages of *Aboriginal*. It gives me something to shoot for in my own writing.

So let's see more of Jon's work and get him out of that McDonald's. Let's keep him flipping words, not burgers!

Best,
Jason J. Marchi
Guildford, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Ryan:

Aboriginal Science Fiction is simply the most thorough and innovative magazine of its kind. It informs and entertains with its own unique brand of humor, as well as seriousness when needed. There are great stories, superb artwork, clear and concise book reviews, and of course there's the crazy alien publisher. All in all, *Aboriginal* is the best reading I've done in quite a while. I thank you for making it available at a very reasonable price.

Now, about the change in name: After reading the responses in issue No. 13 about the possibility of a name change, I feel that I must have my say. I agree with your other readers that *Aboriginal* should not undergo a change of title. The name is different, catchy, and personally one of the reasons I subscribed in the first place. Anyway, if the abbreviation ABO is the problem, you could always use the letters THK (Tales of the Human Kind). (Yeah, but saying THK aloud makes it sound like you dropped something. —Ed.)

If you end up having to make a name change, the proffered suggestion of *Absolute Science Fiction* would seem imitative of the magazine's publisher (also, it does sound like Russian vodka), so the following are my suggestions: *Aberrant Science*

Fiction — this suggests a variability or deviation from established rules or customs ("Wave," by Harlan Ellison, in issue No. 12, portrays this idea very well), and it is superior even to *Aboriginal* in the alphabet. *Advanced Science Fiction* — this suggests moving forward, progress, or rising in rank. *Alien Science Fiction* (or something along that line: *Alienated* or *Alienized*) — this suggests something foreign or different in nature.

Of course, there are many other names you could use (*Actie*, *Adept*, *Alternitie*, etc.), but only if a change in name is definite. Otherwise; *Aboriginal* is the only way to go.

Finally, I noticed that *Aboriginal* welcomes freelance submissions. I am interested in photography and music, as well as writing when I have the time (right now it is 7:09, so I'm writing). One of my long-term goals is to direct, and write the music and screenplay for a full-length film, but I've got to start somewhere, so I am enclosing a SASE with this letter, and would appreciate it if you send a copy of your writer's guidelines.

Thanks again for the impressive magazine and keep the new ideas rolling off the press.

Sincerely yours,
James Frye
Tustin, California

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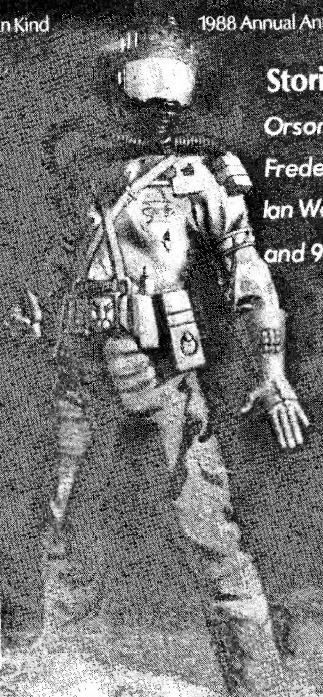
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Dear ASF,

I find your renewal system confusing. When ASF arrives I am not interested in a label on a piece of plastic that goes quickly into the trash. You always refer to issue No. this or that, but the issues have a calendar designation, i.e., Nov-Dec 1988. If you want to call it No. this or that put the number in bold print on the front cover for us dummies of limited abilities to perceive your transcendental meanings. (We now put the issue number in BIG print at the bottom of the contents page. — Ed.) Yours is the best SF magazine going. Keep up the quality — I'm willing to pay for it.

Edward A. Sanders
Peoria, Illinois

Editor's Notes

(Continued from page 44)

categories, but not always, as it sometimes takes the existing categories and turns them sideways or inside out.

Science fiction does not include ghosts, vampires, magic, sword and sorcery, or horror. For the sake of categorization, god, or God if you prefer, the devil, gremlins and Santa Claus are fantasy — not SF. And we don't publish fantasy, strictly defined.

This needs emphasis because fully one quarter of those submitting manuscripts to us don't realize, or recognize, the difference between SF and fantasy. Needless to say, in this short space I can't cover all the possible variations of what is or isn't SF. Nor do I intend to.

Now a knowledgeable and good writer can bend the rules to make exceptions, but it means knowing what the rules are in the first place and knowing how to bend them to make them work.

For instance, in the next issue we'll be publishing the first of two stories by Larry Niven set in the alternate reality he created in *The Magic Goes Away*.

In this reality, magic is real and works by employing a form of energy called "manna."

But like any natural resource, once you use it, it's gone. And its use has to follow rules.

Whether you want to consider Larry's stories SF set in an alternate reality, or fantasy, you'd be hard pressed to find a more logical world.

It also goes to show that even we cheat and bend the rules once in a while. □

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